

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

THE *DAWA*
COMMENTARY
ON THE
QUR'ĀN

BY
ABŪ JA'FAR MUḤAMMAD B. JARĪR
AL-ṬABARĪ

BEING AN ABRIDGED TRANSLATION OF
Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
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THE TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

THIS is the first of five volumes in which it is intended to present an abridged English translation of the whole of Ṭabarī's commentary on the Qur'ān. This commentary consists in greater part, although by no means entirely, of pronouncements on the interpretation of passages of the Qur'ān made by the early generations of Muslims, and handed down in the customary Islamic form of Tradition (*ḥadīth*, *khabar*). Indeed, the important place which Ṭabarī's commentary has held in the Islamic world since its inception is due to the comprehensive collection of these Traditions relevant to Qur'ānic interpretation which is to be found therein. In many cases, it provides the only extant source for these early pronouncements.

The purpose of this introduction is to place Ṭabarī's commentary within the historical framework of the development of Qur'ānic exegesis. A short account will also be given of the sources most frequently cited by Ṭabarī and of the history of the text of the Qur'ān.

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Kathīr b. Ghālib al-Ṭabarī was born at the end of 224 or the beginning of 225 (=AD 839) in Āmul in northern Iran, in the region then known as Ṭabaristān, from which his name, al-Ṭabarī, derives. Because he had shown early intellectual promise, his well-to-do father sent him to study in the religious centre of Raiy, near to present-day Tehran. After preliminary studies there, he left for Baghdad, apparently in the hope of studying with the great Traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), founder of the last of the four great Sunnī schools of law. There are differing accounts of whether he actually did so or not, for he arrived in Baghdad around the time of Ibn Ḥanbal's death.

In his late twenties or early thirties he began his journeys to the important centres of Islamic learning in search of Traditions. This was a customary journey for those who wished to collect Traditions, for one of the main criteria of the authenticity of a Tradition is its chain of transmission (*isnād*). Traditions were handed down from one transmitter to another, and their names were recorded, the subsequent chain being prefaced to each Tradition in some such form as: 'A reported to

me (the recorder of the Tradition) that he was informed by B, who heard from C, from D [and so on down to the person from whom the Tradition originated] that X said: "...". When this handing down of Traditions became systematized, it became standard practice for someone wishing to pass on a Tradition to seek the authority of the one from whom he had heard it, this being considered a guarantee of the correctness of the transmitted text. There is evidence that some early Traditionists thought the writing down of Traditions to be reprehensible on the grounds that writing was alterable in a way in which they considered oral transmission not to be, but there are also reports of other early Traditionists encouraging writing, and by Ṭabarī's time this was common practice.

First Ṭabarī visited Kūfa and Baṣra, the ancient centres of Islamic learning in Iraq. Then, after another stay in Baghdad, he travelled to the towns of Syria and to Egypt. In each of these places he would have sought out those who were learned in Traditions, heard Traditions from them, and received their permission to transmit in his turn, and thus have become the next authenticated link in the chain of transmitters. This process is attested by the remark he makes in the introduction to his commentary where he says that whenever he uses the words 'so-and-so has reported to us', he means that he believes the Tradition has been authentically transmitted to him.¹

While on his journeys, Ṭabarī was concerned to record Traditions not only on the interpretation of the Qur'ān. He is equally famous as a historian, as the author of a vast collection of annals with the title of *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-'l-anbiyā' wa-'l-mulūk wa-'l-khulafā'* (History of the Messengers, Prophets, Kings, and Caliphs), which records the history of the world from the first human, Adam, up to his own time. This work is as important a source for historical Tradition as is his commentary for exegetical Tradition.²

Another field in which Ṭabarī gained prominence was that of the variant readings of the Qur'ān. His *Kitāb al-qirā'āt wa-tanzīl al-Qur'ān* (The Book of Recitations and of the Revelation of the Qur'ān) was considered by many as the standard work on the subject, and Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), who will be mentioned later as the systematizer of Qur'ānic recitation, is said to have held it in great esteem.³

Islamic law (*fiqh*) was also a subject in which Ṭabarī rose to eminence. Originally a follower of al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), he subsequently became the founder of a short-lived school of his own, named the Jarīriya. It seems to have been close to the Shāfi'ī school,

but, apart from an extract in his commentary from what seems to have been his main text on juristic methodology, his *Kitāb laṭīf al-qawl fī al-bayān 'an uṣūl al-aḥkām* (The Book of Subtleties Concerning the Exposition of the Principles of Legislation),⁴ there are no extant works of his from which his legal method might be directly ascertained. His sole surviving juridical writing appears to be parts of the *Ikhtilāf al-fuqahā'* (Divergent Opinions of the Jurists),⁵ but his biographers record other titles.

It is also reported that, while on his journeys, Ṭabarī held discussions with other scholars on such matters as law, the recitation of the Qur'ān, and Arabic literature. On the whole, he managed to keep aloof from the political and sectarian turmoils of his day, although he seems to have incurred the anger of the Ḥanbalīs for his criticism of Ibn Ḥanbal, whom he regarded as only a Traditionist and not as a jurist. It is said that his house in Baghdad was besieged by them because his interpretation of a certain Qur'ānic verse had been at variance with Ḥanbalī doctrine.

Although he travelled much in search of Traditions, his base was Baghdad, and it was here that he became famous as a teacher. The teaching circle seems to have been his preferred medium for the transmission of his acquired knowledge, and the form of his commentary demonstrates the way in which many such medieval texts were composed. The opening sentence tells us that the text of the work was read back to him in AH 306, and in most of the instances where Ṭabarī's own opinion is recorded his words are prefaced by 'Abū Ja'far said: ...' (this has generally been omitted in the translation). Whether or not this should be taken literally to mean that the whole work was transmitted orally, it does clearly demonstrate that dictation was an accepted basis for the transmission of texts such as this. It was common practice for leading students to copy down what their teacher relayed during the teaching sessions, and for them then to submit their copies to him for authentication, such as was given in this case. When they had obtained his permission, they were then entitled to transmit the text in their turn, much as in the case of Traditions, and to pass their copy on to other scribes who would see to it that the work was disseminated. In the case of popular works such as Ṭabarī's commentary, many copies must have been made, for it quickly gained widespread acceptance as a major text.

Ṭabarī's biographers state that he worked at a formidable rate, and many cite the anecdote that he wrote forty pages a day for forty years.

He must therefore have written many of his own works in his own hand, perhaps passing them to his students to make copies which he would then certify.

In addition to writings of his in the fields already mentioned, his biographers also list works by him on *'ilm al-rijāl*, the biographical science concerning the transmitters of Traditions, on the administration of justice (although he is not mentioned as having held any official posts himself), and on ethical conduct. He was the author of a creed (*'aqīda*) which has been recently published,⁶ and smaller works on theological matters are also recorded, in particular a series of monographs on Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, three of the four 'rightly guided' caliphs. Although a staunchly orthodox Sunnī, he was accused of having given support to some Shī'ī views in the latter of these, and thus courted accusations of unorthodoxy, but he was also attacked by Shī'īs for his teaching on the first two caliphs. He died in 310/923, and many are said to have taken part in his funeral; he was mourned by a great number of religious and literary figures.⁷

In his commentary on the Qur'ān, the *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'ān),⁸ Ṭabarī brought together the vast body of exegetic Tradition which he had gathered on his journeys, thus creating the first comprehensive collection of such material. It is clear that this was his first objective in compiling his commentary, but his task was not simply one of recording. The size of the work alone, 12 volumes containing 30 books in the 1978 reprinting of the complete Bulāq edition, indicates the enormous quantity of material which Ṭabarī had scrupulously collected, and within this material there could sometimes be twenty or more different opinions on the interpretation of a single Qur'ānic word or phrase, these differences occurring not only between authorities, but even between Traditions from the same authority. In the face of this, Ṭabarī might have been expected to reduce the quantity of his material by applying some trenchant critical method, but his tendency was more towards comprehensiveness. However, it should not be thought that Ṭabarī collected everything that existed on the subject; he collected only what he considered to be reliably transmitted from orthodox Sunnī authorities, thus excluding, for example, Shī'ī exegesis, with its body of Traditions from their Imams, and Ṣūfī exegesis, with its more allegorical and mystical approach.

Often Ṭabarī is content to list the divergent opinions on a word or phrase, and to leave them as they are, even citing contradictory

opinions from the same person without attempting to resolve them. But in many places he goes further than this, and tries either to reach some kind of harmonization, or to show that one of the opinions should be given more credence than the others. A well-authenticated Tradition from the Prophet is absolutely authoritative for him, and opinions of Companions have higher authority than those of later exegetes. The chain of transmission is therefore of importance to him when he seeks to exclude a Tradition. Another device which he employs is the philological analysis of apparently contradictory words and phrases in order to reconcile them, or he may introduce some more abstract criterion, usually from jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) or grammar. At various points in his commentary, Ṭabarī makes explicit mention of items in his methodology.⁹

The material which Ṭabarī quotes falls into two kinds: the Traditions from the people of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* (although the latter of these two terms came to denote a more allegorical style of interpretation than the former, Ṭabarī apparently uses them as synonyms, as the very title of his commentary indicates), which are cited with full *isnāds*; and the opinions of grammarians, which are usually quoted anonymously as coming from 'a Baṣran grammarian' or 'a Kūfan grammarian'. The exegetes and interpreters he quotes are, for the most part, Companions of the Prophet, of whom the most important is Ibn 'Abbās, or Followers—those, mostly of the next generation, who never met the Prophet but knew one or more of the Companions; and the Baṣran and Kūfan grammarians are usually Abū 'Ubaida and al-Farrā' respectively. Abū 'Ubaida Ma'mar b. al-Muthannā (110/728–209/824–5) was born, and lived, in Baṣra. He was trained in grammar and philology, and later applied the methodology of these sciences to materials pertaining to the transmitted accounts of the history and culture of the Arabs. His *Majāz al-Qur'ān*¹⁰ (*majāz* here means 'interpretation' or 'paraphrase') consists of brief notes on words and phrases in the Qur'ān treated according to the order of the verses and suras, and is the earliest extant work on *tafsīr*. Al-Farrā' was the sobriquet of Abū Zakariyā' Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Kūfī (c. 144/761–207/822), foremost among the early Kūfan grammarians. He wrote extensively on grammar, lexicography, and topics concerning the Qur'ān; among his books is the famous *Kitāb ma'āni 'l-Qur'ān*.¹¹

There is also a third kind of material which Ṭabarī uses, and that is the variant readings of the Qur'ān, but since, as he explains himself, he has dealt with this subject in another of his works, the *Kitāb al-qirā'āt*

mentioned above, he has recourse to this only occasionally.¹² He seems to have regarded the subjects of *tafsīr* and *qirā'āt* as generally quite separate.

Ṭabarī usually expresses his own preferred opinion in the form of a paraphrase of the whole, or part, of the verse in question, although he does not always give systematic reasons for his preferences. This approach, which allows Ṭabarī to leave intact the body of Traditions he has gathered, has in effect been the great virtue of his method, for commentators who came after him were generally spared the trouble of searching individually for the Traditions they wished to cite: they could be found in Ṭabarī, who was henceforth their authority. The great value of his work is reflected in the comment by the jurist Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfārā'inī that 'If a person has to go to China to obtain a copy of Muḥammad b. Jarīr's *Tafsīr*, it will not have been too much [effort].'

His time was, in the broader context of the Islamic sciences in general, one of transition, from a situation in which fairly autonomous centres, where those who had memorized and recorded knowledge were to be found, were the seats of particular theological and legal schools, to one in which cities, such as Baghdad, where formal and systematic teaching was established in colleges and teaching mosques, attracted men of knowledge who collected around themselves large numbers of students, and in which various schools of thought existed side by side. This does not mean that students no longer needed to travel; they still had to if they wanted to reach the pinnacle of their subject, but formal teaching and the sciences, rather than the collection of knowledge preserved in multiple local traditions, had become their purpose. It was thus also the time at which the systematization of the sciences really began, in which a conscious effort was being made to bring some kind of unity to all the disparate and proliferating trends which constituted Islamic knowledge. In this period, some Traditionists, such as the famous al-Bukhārī, who died some 50 years before Ṭabarī, and other compilers of the canonical collections, were more concerned to be systematic than just to collect; for, having spent a great part of their lives, like Ṭabarī, amassing Traditions, they rejected all but the smallest number which they could be quite sure were authentic. Ṭabarī, on the other hand, seems to have been primarily an encyclopedist, concerned to preserve as much as he could, and only secondarily a systematizer.

The history of *tafsīr* has traditionally been seen to have begun with the Companions and Followers, who were in closest contact with the

Revelation. Ṭabarī quotes from all four of the 'rightly guided' caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī, as well as from 'Ā'isha, one of the Prophet's wives. However, by far the most important figure from the point of view of Traditional exegesis was the Companion Ibn 'Abbās. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim, commonly known as Ibn 'Abbās, was the son of the Prophet's paternal uncle. He was born three years before the *hijra*. Due to his close blood relationship with the Prophet, and to the fact that his aunt Maimūna was one of the Prophet's wives, he grew up in close proximity to Muḥammad. Several Traditions record the Prophet praying that Ibn 'Abbās should be given wisdom and the ability to interpret the Qur'ān. When the Prophet died he was still a youth, either 13 or, according to some reports, 15 years old. He then set about frequenting the oldest Companions to gather from them reports concerning words and deeds of the Prophet which he had not heard or seen himself. He was called the 'Doctor (*ḥabir/ḥibr*)' of the Community, and the 'Ocean (*baḥr*)', on account of his legendary knowledge.

He is famous for having attained an exceptional degree of knowledge of the Qur'ānic text and its interpretation, but was also a renowned expert in pre-Islamic history and the early genre of biography of the Prophet known as *maghāzī* ('military expeditions'), in *fiqh* (Islamic law), and in pre-Islamic poetry. He is reputed to have taught all of these subjects on a formal basis. Many turned to him for juristic opinions and exegesis of the Book, and many commented upon his extraordinary intellectual abilities. It is also said that he frequently resorted to deriving explanations through speculation (*ijtihād bi-'l-ra'y*).

His exegetic utterances were collected into volumes with *isnāds* going back to various of his students and companions, some of whom are mentioned below, but there is a great deal of controversy about the dating of these works and about the extent to which his own doctrines can be ascertained from them. However, it is commonly agreed that Arabic poetry gained its acceptance among Muslim scholars on account of his frequent use of it to support his interpretations. Such a use of poetic quotation is a notable feature of Ṭabarī's own commentary.

Ibn 'Abbās is thus regarded as a veritable *exemplum* of the Muslim scholar, but there is also an important political and military aspect to his life, one which began after the murder of the third caliph, 'Uthmān. Initially, he was associated with the fourth caliph, 'Alī, who made him governor of Baṣra, but he apparently fell out with him and returned to Mecca. He seems to have been subsequently involved in the political

dispute over the caliphate between 'Alī's son, al-Ḥasan, and the Umayyad Mu'āwiyā, and is said to have expropriated a large sum from the Baṣran treasury. Much later, when 'Abd Allāh b. Zubair staged a revolt against the Umayyads and took control of Mecca, Ibn 'Abbās and Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, another of 'Alī's sons, refused to accept his leadership and were imprisoned. They were subsequently rescued, and escaped to Ṭā'if, where Ibn 'Abbās died in 68/687–8, at the age of 70. His funeral was led by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, who said of him: 'By Allāh, today the "master (*rabbānī*)" of this community has died.'

Ibn 'Abbās attracted around himself a number of companions and students, mainly in Mecca. Those most frequently cited by Ṭabarī are 'Ikrima, Mujāhid, Sa'īd b. Jubair, and 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ. 'Ikrima Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Barbarī, was a slave of Ibn 'Abbās, and is generally thought to have been a Khārijī; he died in 105/723–4 at an advanced age. Abu 'l-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Makkī (21/642–104/722) also heard Traditions from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ubayy b. Ka'b, and is said to have had a special interest in the supernatural. Abū 'Abd Allāh Sa'īd b. Jubair al-Asadī al-Kūfī (b. 45/665) was executed by al-Ḥajjāj in 95/714. 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ was born in the Yemen of Nubian parents; he died in Mecca in 114–15/732–3. Abū Ḥanīfa, the founder of the earliest of the four major Sunnī schools of law, says that he attended his lectures, and he is said to have used speculative thinking (*ijtihād bi-'l-ra'y*). Another Follower who was credited with transmissions from Ibn 'Abbās was al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī al-Balkhī al-Khurāsānī (d. 105/732). This transmission, however, is considered weak, since it is generally accepted that al-Ḍaḥḥāk never met Ibn 'Abbās, but learnt his teachings instead through Sa'īd b. Jubair.

Ibn 'Abbās is the most frequently quoted authority in Ṭabarī's commentary, a fact which reflects the supreme importance of this figure in traditional exegesis. That he was a teacher as well as an important source for exegetical opinion is reflected in the fact that his students not only transmitted his interpretations, but were exegetes in their own right, some of them being credited with their own written *tafsīrs*.

Another Companion important for Traditional exegesis was Ibn Mas'ūd, although his status has been generally held to be below that of Ibn 'Abbās. Ṭabarī cites him, especially in a compound chain of transmission including Ibn 'Abbās as well, but he also frequently cites Traditions from several of his disciples. 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd b. Ghāfil

b. Ḥabīb, also referred to by the name Ibn Umm 'Abd, was a Bedouin of humble origins, who, after an early conversion to Islam (he was, according to some, the third, and according to others the sixth, person to become Muslim), was employed by the Prophet in fairly menial tasks but ones which ensured an almost daily contact between him and Muḥammad. Thus he became a source for various details of the Prophet's life. He was one of those who emigrated to Abyssinia when conditions for the Muslims in Mecca seriously deteriorated, but he returned in time to follow Muḥammad when he emigrated to Medina. He fought at the battles of Badr and Uhud, and was a close friend of a number of Companions, mostly non-Meccan. After the death of Muḥammad, he joined in the military exploits of the expanding Community, particularly in Iraq, and eventually settled in Kūfa. There he became involved in administrative and ambassadorial tasks, but he fell into disgrace with the third caliph, 'Uthmān, and returned to Medina, where he died in AH 32 or 33 at more than 60 years of age.

He is portrayed as an extremely pious man, devoted to Muḥammad and his family, and it is said that whenever he gave information about the Prophet he would tremble and break out into a sweat, taking great care to express himself accurately. He seems always to have been concerned to uphold the rights of the humble, and to protect the newly founded religion, especially against the machinations of the Meccan aristocracy.

Like Ibn 'Abbās, he specialized in exegesis, but tended more towards allegorical interpretation. Although Ṭabarī gives many Traditions going back to Ibn Mas'ūd, he does not accord him the same elevated rank as Ibn 'Abbās. His 'school' was based in Kūfa, and those of his companions whose reports are quoted by Ṭabarī include 'Alqama b. Qais, Qatāda, (al-)Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī. 'Alqama b. Qais b. 'Abd Allāh b. Mālīk al-Nakha'ī was born in the Prophet's lifetime and heard Traditions from Ibn Mas'ūd and other Companions; he died in Kūfa in 62/681. Qatāda b. Di'āma al-Sadūsī (60/680–118/736) was a Baṣran of Bedouin origin and blind from birth, and his memory for Traditions and genealogies was proverbial; he also heard Traditions from Anās b. Mālīk and was a pupil of (al-)Ḥasan Abū Sa'īd b. Abi 'l-Ḥasan Yaṣār al-Baṣrī (21/642–110/728), a man who was famous for his piety and also for his reading of the Qur'ān, which was later adopted as one of the 'Fourteen'. Ibrāhīm b. Yazīd b. Qais b. al-Aswad al-Nakha'ī (46/666–96/815) was a Kūfan Follower, famous as a jurist as well as an exegete; he also heard from 'Ā'isha and Anas b. Mālīk.

Ibn 'Abbās is traditionally thought of as the founder of a Meccan 'school' of *tafsīr*, and Ibn Mas'ūd of a Kūfan 'school', but there is also a Medinan 'school' whose ancestor is usually taken to have been the Companion Ubaiy b. Ka'b. Ubaiy b. Ka'b b. Qais b. 'Ubaid, known as Abu 'l-Mundhir, had been a Jewish rabbi (*ḥabr*) before embracing Islam. He thus could read and write, and was said to have been conversant with the 'old scriptures'. He became one of the 'scribes of the Revelation (*kuttāb al-wahy*)'. He fought with Muḥammad at the battles of Badr and Uḥud, and is said to have been present with 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when he took Jerusalem; he is said to have drawn up the peace treaty on this occasion. He died in Medina, but there is a great deal of discrepancy between the various dates given for his death, varying from 18/639 to 30/651 or even later. Ṭabarī also quotes from a number of Medinan Followers, including Abu 'l-Āliya, al-Rabī' b. Anas, Ibn Ka'b, and Zaid b. Aslam. Abu 'l-Āliya Rufai' b. Mihrān al-Riyāhī (d. 90/708–9 or 96/714) was a Baṣran by origin. He heard from many Companions, including Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, and Ubaiy b. Ka'b, and taught Followers such as Qatāda and al-Rabī' b. Anas. Al-Rabī' b. Anas al-Bakrī al-Baṣrī al-Khurāsānī (d. 139/756) narrated from Anas b. Mālik, Abu 'l-Āliya, and (al-)Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He had to flee from al-Ḥajjāj when the latter was the governor of Baṣra, and settled in Khurāsān in north west Iran. Ibn Ka'b al-Quraṣī (d. 118/736) heard from Ibn Mas'ūd and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, among others, and is said to have been one of Ibn Ishāq's sources for his biography of the Prophet. Zaid b. Aslam al-'Adawī (d. 136/753) was famous for his juristic as well as for his exegetical teaching. He heard from 'Ā'isha and Anas, among others.

Other Companions who should be mentioned here in connection with Ṭabarī's commentary are 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar, Zaid b. Thābit, Anas b. Mālik, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and Abū Huraira. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar (d. 73/693), the son of the second caliph, was famous as a scrupulous transmitter of *ḥadīth*. His piety and strict adherence to the precepts of Islam made of him a model for subsequent generations of Muslims, and he gained great respect for his non-involvement in the political struggles following the Prophet's death, although he took part in many battles and military campaigns, both during Muḥammad's lifetime and afterwards. Zaid b. Thābit (d. 45/666) was born in Medina, where he also died. He became a secretary of the Prophet and a scribe of the Qur'ān, and was an acknowledged expert on legal questions as well as on the reading of the Qur'ān; it is to him that the supervision of the

compilation of the text of the Qur'ān under 'Uthmān is generally ascribed. Anas b. Mālik, Abū Ḥamza, was also born in Medina and was given by his mother to the Prophet as a servant at the age of ten years. He took part in the wars of conquest after the Prophet's death, and died in old age in Baṣra in 91–3/709–11. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. 42/662) was from the Yemen and joined Muḥammad and Islam during the Prophet's Medinan period. Later he had an adventurous political career, and was the source of one of the non-canonical codices of the Qur'ān, which gained popularity in Baṣra. Abū Huraira al-Dawsī (d. 58/678 or 59/679) also came from the Yemen and joined Islam during the Medinan period. He is famous for the extraordinary number of Traditions he is said to have transmitted about the Prophet even though he was only with him for a short period, but many of these do not stand up to critical analysis as being his own.

These figures among the Companions and Followers are the principal sources in the Traditional exegesis of which Ṭabarī's commentary provides the most complete compilation. As was mentioned in the case of Ibn 'Abbās, some of Ṭabarī's Traditions go back to the Companions through the Followers associated with them, but in other cases the chains of transmission stop at the Followers. Several of these Companions and Followers have books of *tafsīr* linked with their names. However, the question of the authenticity of these compilations has been a controversial one. Are they genuine works written by the authorities with whose names they are associated? Are they later compilations using genuine Traditions from these authorities? Or do they contain much later Traditions postdated, as it were, through fabricated chains of transmission in order to gain acceptance for particular theological views? These are difficult questions since many of these works are unavailable or lost, and of those that are extant no thorough study has been made. On the whole, however, it has been the authenticity of individual Traditions themselves, and not their compilations, which has engaged the interest of Muslim scholars of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*. This kind of critical study, however, as has been said, was not a task to which Ṭabarī methodically applied himself, and as such he typifies the beginning of the transitional stage in the history of the Islamic sciences of the ninth and tenth centuries. His commentary can be seen as marking a final stage in exegesis based on Tradition, a form of exegesis which is denoted in Arabic by the phrase *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*; it constitutes a corpus of exegetical Tradition to which later scholars would apply more critical standards.

Several points can be noted about the different styles present in traditional exegesis as presented by Ṭabarī in his commentary. In some cases the explanation of passages in the Qur'ān is based by Companions on their recollection of the occasions on which those passages were revealed (*asbāb al-nuzūl*, = causes of revelation). Other kinds of 'historical' commentary were the so-called *isrā'īliyyāt*, stories about the Jews and the Christians, sometimes narrated on the authority of those, like the Yemenite Followers Ka'b b. al-Akhbār (d. 32/652 or 34/654) and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732), who had originally belonged to these two scriptural religions, together with other accounts from the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs. In this respect, one of Ṭabarī's sources deserves special mention, for he was foremost among those collecting historical Traditions and arranging them in the form of a biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 150–2/767–9), known simply as Ibn Ishāq, apparently gathered his historical material in three volumes: the first was concerned with the pre-Islamic history of the prophets and their communities, the second with the life of Muḥammad up to the *hijra*, and the third with the Prophet's Medinan period. His work survives in a recension by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/834), but this contains only that part of the first volume which is concerned with Muḥammad's ancestors from Abraham onwards; the other two parts were abridged by him, and the combined whole was given the title *Kitāb sīrat rasūl Allāh*.¹³ Ibn Ishāq also wrote a history of the Caliphs, which is altogether lost. Ṭabarī quotes Ibn Ishāq frequently, but his citations are particularly important for the material which he gives, both in his *Tafsīr* and in his *Ta'rikh*, from Ibn Ishāq's first book and for which he is the sole source.

A second kind of commentary arises from the need to explain obscure expressions or unusual grammatical constructions. Ibn 'Abbās is one of the major sources for lexical explanations, and it is in this connection that he frequently employed poetical quotation, but Ṭabarī also uses his own knowledge of the Arabic language and its literature to justify particular lexical interpretations, often by appeal to the notion of the 'basic meaning (*aṣl*)' of a word or a verbal root. Also frequently used are the early grammarians as sources for grammatical explanations, often involving the discussion of variants in the vowelings of the text. These are cited independently, but there is frequently a correlation between grammatical commentary and commentary from Tradition. As with Traditions, Ṭabarī usually cites two or more opposing views, sometimes deciding in favour of one of them.

A third aspect of traditional exegesis concerns the use it makes of variant recitations of words or phrases in the Qur'ān. As was mentioned above, this was a subject about which Ṭabarī composed a separate treatise, and this is the reason, he says, why he has kept his discussion of these variants to a minimum in his commentary. In connection with the recitations of the Qur'ān it is necessary to add some details to what Ṭabarī has himself said about the history of the Qur'ānic text in his introduction.

Ṭabarī cites, among others, a Tradition from Zaid b. Thābit which gives an account of the compilation of the 'official' codex of the Qur'ān under 'Uthmān in which Zaid played the major part.¹⁴ This account contains the information that two recensions of the collected Qur'ānic text were made, the first authorized by the first caliph, Abū Bakr, prompted by the second caliph, 'Umar (this was written down originally in Abū Bakr's time on individual sheets [*ṣuḥūf*]), but later in a single manuscript [*muṣḥaf*] during 'Umar's period of office), and the second authorized by the third caliph, 'Uthmān, which, according to this Tradition from Zaid, was found to agree with the first. It is this second version which became the official codex (*muṣḥaf*) of the Qur'ān, to be followed by all Muslims. In Ṭabarī's commentary on this Tradition, he goes on to say, following the commonly accepted history, that 'Uthmān had his codex sent out to the main cities (Damascus, Baṣra, Kūfa, and Mecca) and had all other versions of the text destroyed so that the Community might unite on a single text and thus avoid dissension. However, 'Uthmān's action did not erase all traces of earlier versions. Some of them, usually referred to in the sources as codices (*maṣāḥif*) had become associated with individual cities. For example, Ibn Mas'ūd's codex was widely followed for a time by the people of Kūfa, and Ubaiy b. Ka'b's codex by the people of Damascus. With the promulgation of the 'Uthmānic text, these recensions became non-canonical, although, due to the eminence of the Companions concerned, variants from them continued to be cited in learned discussions of the Qur'ānic text. Comparison of the variant copies, and the setting forth of their differences, became the subject of several works by Muslim scholars in the first four centuries, but the only surviving work of this kind is Ibn Abī Dāwūd's *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*. However, information about the differences in the codices can be gleaned from extracts included in other authors' works. The main point on which they diverge concerns five short prayer-like suras, of which the 'Uthmānic codex contains three (suras 1, 113, and 114); Ibn

Mas'ūd included none of them, while Ubaiy's codex contained the three together with two others that have never been part of the canonical text. Other variations concern mostly single words, which appear in the various codices as different synonyms. There is also variation in the order of suras.

It is important to remember that the Arabic script is a consonantal one, that is to say it represents graphically only the consonants and the long vowels. In 'Uthmān's time, short vowels and most long vowels were not written down, and this meant that disputes about the correct reading could not be resolved by appeal to the written text. Moreover, Arabic was written in this early period without many of the diacritical dots above and below letter forms by which letters of the same shape but with different pronunciation are distinguished (e.g. ر [r] and ز [z]); in fact, the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet (excluding the *hamza*) were represented by only fifteen letter-forms. It was thus a purely consonantal text which was established by 'Uthmān's codex, and the possibility of variant readings based on different vowelings was not thereby eliminated.

These variant readings based on the 'Uthmānic codex differ surprisingly little in the consonantal text, but very soon new readings arose differing not only in vowelings, but also in the consonantal text due to the contamination of the 'Uthmānic codex with readings from the copies ascribed to other Companions. At the same time, improvements in Arabic orthography by which all the consonants became clearly distinguished and the three short vowel marks were introduced meant that the variant readings became more amenable to scholarly treatment and were given *isnāds* in the same way as were Traditions.¹⁵ Thus they became known according to the names of readers with whom they were deemed to have originated.

By Ṭabarī's time, the comparison of these variants was a science in itself, and it was due to the endeavours of his younger contemporary Abū Bakr b. Mujāhid (d. 324/936) that the next stage in the history of the Qur'ānic text was accomplished. He decided to end the controversies about the correct reading of the text by declaring that only seven of the readings were permissible. He chose one each from Medina, Mecca, Damascus, and Baṣra, and three from Kūfa. These readings became official in 322/934, and at least two scholars were forced to retract their own opinions about variants. Ibn Mujāhid based his choice of seven on a Prophetic Tradition according to which the Qur'ān was revealed according to seven *ḥarfs*, and he interpreted *ḥarf*

to mean 'reading'. In time the seven readings which Ibn Mujāhid had chosen were augmented, first by three (the 'Ten'), and then by four (the 'Fourteen'). In addition, two transmitters were recognized for each of Ibn Mujāhid's seven readings and the three later adopted. Although it was only Ibn Mujāhid's seven which came to be recognized as permissible readings for reciters of the Qur'ān, there was a proliferation from the ten readings (*qirā'a*) through the institution of two 'ways (*ṭarīq*)' of reciting the two 'transmissions (*riwāya*)' of each, and then two 'ways' for each of the preceding 'ways', but these were really of interest only to the most unremittingly scholastic exegetes and grammarians. Now there are only two transmissions in general use among reciters and in printed texts: Ḥaṣṣ's transmission of 'Āṣim's Kūfan reading, which was adopted for the standard 1924 Egyptian lithographed edition of the Qur'ān, and Warsh's transmission of Nāfi's Medinan reading, which is followed in the Maghrib.

In his introduction, Ṭabarī examines the Traditions concerning the *ḥarfs* on which Ibn Mujāhid later based his reform. He refutes several interpretations of what *ḥarf* is to be taken to mean, but he nowhere mentions the interpretation given later by Ibn Mujāhid. For example, he is particularly concerned to argue against the interpretation according to which *ḥarf* signifies a 'mode of revelation', such as command, prohibition, and so forth. For Ṭabarī such an interpretation is impossible, because of the existence of Traditions in which the Prophet is said to have declared the recitation according to each of the seven *ḥarfs* to be permissible; for, he says, if, according to one *ḥarf*, a certain action was declared licit in the Qur'ān, while, according to another, the same action was declared illicit, the Prophet would never have said that they were equally permissible. According to the interpretation of *ḥarf* which Ṭabarī supports, it means a 'mode of recitation', and in this case the Prophet's consent is comprehensible on the grounds that the seven different *ḥarfs* were only lexical variations which did not affect the meaning. These variant 'modes of recitation' either were subsequently absorbed into a unitary text when 'Uthmān had his codex compiled in accordance with the dialect of Quraish and declared it to be thenceforth the sole official one, or else dropped out of use. Clearly, then, Ṭabarī cannot have understood *ḥarf* to mean the non-canonical recensions such as Ibn Mas'ūd's. Exactly what opinions he held about the status of such of these non-canonical versions as

survived he does not say in his commentary; it is likely that he would have made reference to them in his *Kitāb al-qirā'āt*, and study of the manuscript of this work, if it is genuine, could throw light on the matter. However, both Ṭabarī and Ibn Mujāhid agreed on not accepting the Companions' codices as correct versions of the Qur'ān.

It should be mentioned here that Ṭabarī's reading of the Qur'ān differs in a few places from the 'Āṣim *via* Ḥafs reading. Such variations are found with practically all commentators. Where there is a difference, Ṭabarī's preferred readings have been kept in the text of the Qur'ān printed at the beginning of the commentary to each verse, and the variation signalled in a note.

If Ṭabarī's commentary stands at the end of the early period of *tafsīr* with its concentration on Traditional exegesis, and marks a summation of the material available in his age, it also stands at the beginning of a period in which *tafsīr* was to develop into a more critical and scholastic endeavour, with the refining of methodology and the establishing of the 'sciences of the Qur'ān ('*ulūm al-Qur'ān*') on a systematic basis. A great deal more theology and philosophy was introduced and accepted, and the Traditional material collected by Ṭabarī was pared down to more manageable dimensions by a critical approach to the sources and the transmitters. It will not be possible here to make anything more than a brief mention of some of the leading figures in the development of *tafsīr* after Ṭabarī, and to point out their particular contributions.

While Ṭabarī represents the field of Traditional exegesis, the scholar Abu 'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, who was born a century and a half after Ṭabarī's death, in 467/1075, and like him was Persian, represents a more rationalistic approach. Al-Zamakhsharī belonged to the school of theology of the Mu'tazila, the early rationalist and speculative school which was later eclipsed among the Sunnīs by the theology of the school named after al-Ash'arī (260/873–324/935), a contemporary of Ṭabarī. The Mu'tazila introduced rationalist concepts and methodology into Islamic theology, and held opinions about such matters as the attributes of God and human action and free will which were contrary to those of more conservative, Traditional scholars—for example, Ibn Ḥanbal. The dialectic method of the Ash'arite school was largely adopted from the Mu'tazila, but put to use by them to defend the more conservative doctrines, which thenceforth became the theological orthodoxy in the Sunnī world.

In his commentary *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl*,¹⁶ which he completed in the year 528/1134, al-Zamakhsharī combines Traditions with theological discussion, grammatical and lexicographical exegesis—in which poetical quotation plays an important role—and examination of the rhetoric of the Qur'ān (also connected with the doctrine of the inimitability [*i'jāz*] of the Qur'ān). But he presented Mu'tazilī theses and arguments in such a pervasive and artful way that it became difficult for those who subsequently tried to purge his work of unorthodoxy to discover them all. In spite of its Mu'tazilī colours, *al-Kashshāf* gained great popularity among the orthodox, and, together with Ṭabarī's commentary, became part of the foundation for later exegesis.

Just five years after al-Zamakhsharī's death in 538/1144, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Rāzī was born in the city of Raiy, where Ṭabarī had begun his religious studies. He too became famous as a theologian, but of the orthodox Ash'arite school, and generally opposed to Mu'tazilī ideas. He was above all concerned with the integration of philosophy into the theological sphere. His commentary, the *Mafātīḥ al-ghaib*,¹⁷ is also known as *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (The Great Commentary), both because of its size and for the breadth of learning it displays. Whereas Ṭabarī seeks to bring internal harmony to the mass of exegetical Tradition which was available to him, al-Rāzī, although he made use of Traditional material, is particularly remarkable for the way in which he seeks to harmonize the orthodox interpretation of the Qur'ān with the philosophical and theological positions which had become an important part of Islamic scholarship by the 6th/12th century. This monumental enterprise was left unfinished at the time of his death in 606/1209, but was completed by one of his students.

In the next century, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar al-Baiḍāwī (d. 674/1275–716/1316) wrote his commentary, the *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl*,¹⁸ which has long been regarded as the standard commentary on the Qur'ān in the Sunnī world. It is based in large part on the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī, but purged of most of its theological unorthodoxies, and al-Baiḍāwī fills in lacunae with material from other sources. Much shorter than the commentaries of Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī, and shorter even than al-Zamakhsharī's, it has the advantage of supplying brief explanations for every verse, phrase by phrase, but without reducing commentary to mere paraphrase. This style of brief step-by-step commentary, which became known as *tafsīr musalsal* ('chained' commentary), with its facility as a means of

reference, was subsequently adopted in several *tafsīrs* intended for the student or the non-expert. Al-Baiḍawī's commentary also follows a pattern which becomes almost the standard: the extent of the exegesis diminishes from the beginning to the end of the Qur'ān, the suras at the beginning being allotted much more space than those at the end.

In the same century Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr b. Faraj al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī, known as al-Qurṭubī, wrote his *Al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān wa-l-mubayyin li-mā taḍammāna min al-sunna wa-āyāt al-furqān*.¹⁹ This eminent Mālikī scholar was born in Spain but settled in Upper Egypt, where he died in 671/1272. His commentary begins with a very thorough and extensive introduction, describing his methodology and treating the moral and theological points which the Qur'ān raises, not only textually, but also as a result of its central role in Muslim life and worship. In the commentary itself, al-Qurṭubī records a vast body of Traditions, many of which are not to be found in Ṭabarī's work, concentrating particularly on matters of law, although, on the other hand, he is sparing in his use of the *isrā'īlīyāt* material and similar pre-Islamic accounts. There is also much philological and stylistic exegesis together with theological discussions, but his work eschews al-Rāzī's philosophical approach.

Finally, mention should be made of Abu 'l-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (849/1445–911/1505), born in Egypt but of Persian descent. Having travelled to, and studied in, the centres of learning in his homeland, and after making the pilgrimage to Mecca, he settled down in Cairo to a life of teaching and writing, although towards the end he retired to a nearby island on the Nile after having been accused of irregularities in the management of the school in which he taught. He set himself the aim of writing on all the areas of Islamic science, and his voluminous writings remain as impressive compilations of Islamic knowledge in his time. He collected Traditions and wrote on *ḥadīth* criticism, he left valuable books on philology and applied the methodology of jurisprudence to grammar, and he also composed historical and literary works. But perhaps more important than all of these were his various works on the Qur'ān and its interpretation. He wrote several volumes of *tafsīr*, each from different aspects, one of which, the *Tafsīr al-Jalālīn*,²⁰ written by his teacher and himself (both having the name Jalāl al-Dīn), has become one of the chief short *musalsal* commentaries. He also expanded the introduction to a planned larger work of commentary into a book on the Qur'ānic sciences which he called the *Itqān*.²¹ This work is a summary compilation of all

the subjects having to do with *tafsīr* with which, in al-Suyūfī's opinion, a commentator of his time ought to be conversant. The table of contents has been translated in an appendix to this introduction.

The basic stages which have been outlined here apply also to a great extent to *tafsīrs* written outside the Sunnī tradition. Twelver Shī'ī scholars, for example, collected their own corpuses of Tradition which originated, in their case, not only from the Prophet, but also from the Twelve Imams, beginning with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. A great many of these dealt with the interpretation of Qur'ānic verses, and in the Shī'ī tradition the Imams are held to have a special knowledge of the sacred Book, on a par with that of the Prophet: he had been entrusted to bring the Message to mankind, they are the guardians of the interpretation of the text. A particularity of Shī'ī exegesis was the emphasis on *ta'wīl*, an interpretative function which could only be performed by the Imams. Ṭabarī, it has been pointed out, used the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* interchangeably, but for the Shī'a these were two distinct approaches to interpretation. *Tafsīr* could be accomplished by anyone who had the proper qualifications, and concerned the outward meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the Book, but *ta'wīl* involved knowledge of a special kind possessed only by the Imams from the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bait*), which enabled them to interpret the inward meaning (*bāṭin*). According to this doctrine, the distinction between the parts of the Qur'ān which had a clear meaning (*muḥkam*) and those which were obscure, or ambiguous (*mutashābih*), was one of degree only, for the Imams could use their special knowledge to interpret correctly the ambiguous parts. This contrasts with Sunnī doctrine, according to which the interpretation of the ambiguous parts is something known only to God. A significant part of Shī'ī *ta'wīl*, therefore, involves the interpretation of obscure passages, especially in so far as these were taken as referring to the Imams themselves; for example, such words and phrases as 'those in authority (*ulu 'l-amr*)' (4: 59), the 'waymarks' (*'alāmāt*)' (16: 16), and the 'people of remembrance (*ahl al-dhikr*)' whom the Qur'ān instructs believers to question if they are in ignorance (16: 43, 21: 7), were interpreted as referring to them.

These *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* interpretations from the Imams were transmitted by the first generation of Shī'īs in the form of *ḥadīth*, and formed a basis for interpretation for later Shī'īs similar to the Traditions from Ibn 'Abbās and other Companions for the Sunnīs. Some of these Shī'ī Traditions were collected into commentaries by such figures as 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939), a contemporary

of Ṭabarī. The Shī'ī science of *tafsīr* then developed in sophistication, although works such as *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, written by the Shaykh Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067),²² and the *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī/al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153),²³ reflect more their Mu'tazilī antecedents than they do the early Shī'ī Tradition literature.

The Ṣūfīs also developed their own style of exegesis, again emphasizing the contrast between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*. For them, this latter was a kind of spiritual realization of the meaning of the Qur'ān achieved through following the disciplines laid down by the Ṣūfī masters, and it became known as *al-ta'wīl al-kashfī* (esoteric [lit. 'illuminating', 'unveiling'] exegesis—the Ṣūfīs call themselves the 'people of unveiling [*ahl al-kashf*]'). The first period of Ṣūfī exegesis is characterized by *tafsīrs* attributed to figures such as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 161/778), which constitute a body of teachings concerning the spiritual intuitions to be attained through meditating on the meanings of the Qur'ān. Later on, the sayings of the early masters were brought together, as, for example, by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (325/937 or 330/942–412/1021). The classical period of Ṣūfī exegesis reached its culmination in the works of Muḥyi 'l-Dīn b. al-'Arabī (560/1165–638/1240), to whom a *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* is attributed, although it seems more likely that it was written by one of the representatives of his school of mystical philosophy, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 730/1330).²⁴ The controversial teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī, one of the outstanding figures of Islamic mysticism, bear witness to outstanding spiritual insight as well as powerful intellect. He brought together mysticism, philosophy, and theology in a vast synthesis, reflected in a complexity of technical vocabulary which has engaged the attention of commentators of his works to this day, and the *Ta'wīlāt*, which is not a continuous, verse-by-verse commentary, but deals only with about one third of the Qur'ān, those parts which have a particular relevance for spiritual exegesis, presents its own difficulties of interpretation for those who are not familiar with this vocabulary.

The degree of complexity and thoroughness to which the Qur'ānic sciences had developed by the 9th/15th century is clearly demonstrated by the list of contents which al-Suyūṭī gives at the beginning of his *Itqān*. As was remarked above, this work is virtually an encyclopaedia of the state of Qur'ānic studies at that time, and marks another point of transition. If the classical period of Qur'ānic commentary was heralded in by Ṭabarī, it can be said to have come to an end with al-Suyūṭī.

Tafsīr literature grew in size after al-Suyūṭī's time, but stayed more or less within the framework outlined then and summarized in the *Itqān*. In the contemporary period, *tafsīrs* continue to be written by scholars working within the traditional perspective, although they seek to reflect the needs of the present; but this century has also seen the publication of commentaries which break, to some extent, the classical mould. These 'modern' commentaries respond to the different kinds of questions which contemporary Muslims address to their religion and its sacred text. Perhaps the first major example of this new kind of commentary was Muḥammad 'Abduh's *Tafsīr al-manār*²⁵ with its reformist approach and its emphasis on the accessibility of the Qur'ān. Later examples include those, like Sayyid Quṭb's *Fī ḡilāl al-Qur'ān*²⁶ (In the Shade of the Qur'ān), with a noticeable political and ideological content, and those which seek to establish a relationship between the Qur'ānic text and the findings of modern natural sciences.

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The initial inspiration for this abridged English translation of Ṭabarī's commentary came from the pioneering French version which is now being prepared by M. Pierre Godé, and of which three volumes have appeared to date.²⁷ However, the problems of translating a book such as this through the intermediary of a second language proved insurmountable, and so it was decided that the English translation would have to be made directly from the Arabic. Another reason for this decision, which affects not only the translation but also the nature of the abridgement, was that M. Godé has based his translation on the old Egyptian edition, and this has now been superseded by the Shākir and Shākir edition.²⁸ While this new edition helps to solve many textual problems, it also has the disadvantage of being incomplete; this means that the later volumes of the English translation will necessarily, like the French, have to be based on the older edition.

The method adopted in the abridgement takes into account several important aspects of the text. As was pointed out above, the primary importance of Ṭabarī's commentary lies in the wealth of exegetical Tradition which it contains; it was therefore decided that as much of this material as possible would be retained. To this end, the translation attempts to include all the important variant opinions about interpretation from the Traditions. On the other hand, the variant opinions of the grammarians and the experts in recitation have been kept to a

minimum. Individual Traditions have generally been translated intact. Where there are two or more Traditions giving essentially the same opinion, only one has been translated, the other, or others, being indicated by a number in square brackets which refers to the numbering of *ḥadīths* in the Sh. & Sh. edition. Sometimes two Traditions may be substantially the same, differing only in points of detail; where these points have been considered important, they have been translated and included in the main Tradition and their origin indicated. Generally only the source authority for a Tradition has been given and the rest of the chain of transmission omitted, but for anyone who wishes to examine the complete *isnād* the numbering of the Traditions will facilitate reference to the Arabic text, in which the *isnāds* can be found. A final point about Traditions is that they very often contain repetitions of *qāla* (= he, i.e., the source authority, said: . . .). While these repetitions may be of interest in the analysis of the texts, they tend to interrupt narrative continuity, so they have been omitted and replaced with '(...)'. The reader should take care not to confuse this use of '(...)' within a Tradition with its use in Ṭabarī's own text as explained below.

Within Ṭabarī's own text, the abridgement takes the following points into account. In some cases Ṭabarī makes observations which are peripheral to the main argument, or his comments concern linguistic, or other points which translate unsatisfactorily into another language. In these cases his text has been entirely omitted, the omission being indicated by '(...)'. Another kind of material which has not been translated at all, but whose omission has been specifically indicated, is Ṭabarī's quotations of poetry. These quotations are rarely employed for their substance but usually to lend support to arguments for certain idiomatic usages of words or phrases. Idiomatic usage is seldom common to both Arabic and English, and so it was felt that the translation of the poetry would probably contribute less to the clarification, and more to the obfuscation, of the meaning of the words or phrases concerned. Elsewhere, passages which have been thought worth including, but in summary form, have been indicated by '§' and printed in a smaller point-size.

Usually Ṭabarī gives a paraphrase of the verse he is commenting, and this usefully summarizes the conclusions he has come to on the basis of the material to hand. Most of these have been translated verbatim and indicated by '¶'.

Arabic texts in manuscript and in early printed editions usually appear as continuous prose with no punctuation or paragraph

markings, but this presents little difficulty for the accustomed reader since the repetition of key words and phrases divides the text up in such a way as to reflect its form. More recent editions, however, generally accord more with the conventions of modern printing, and this is of considerable advantage, especially for a reader who does not intend to read from cover to cover, but wishes, for example, to be easily able to find a particular passage in which he is interested.

The incorporation of modern punctuation is also a great improvement in relation to style and the formal properties of the text itself, and to this end an attempt has been made in the present translation to divide the text up typographically so as to reflect the structure of Ṭabarī's arguments and the way in which he presents his material. One of the effects that this has had on the translation is that the structural function of certain words and phrases (for example, 'If someone were to say: "...", then it should be said to him: "...") has been taken over by conventions adopted in the type-setting. Some of these conventions, which pertain to the method followed in summarizing the text, have already been explained, and others are given in the list of sigla at the end of this introduction, but there is one set of conventions which is not strictly part of the abridgement. As was pointed out earlier on, a good deal of the commentary is in the form of a dialectic in which various opinions are stated and a conclusion reached, and, in order to bring out this form, the stages in the dialectic have been typographically indicated in the translation, each opinion being signalled at the start of a new paragraph. Further, the arguments have been divided up into three kinds: those having to do with linguistic problems, those which consider different recitations of a passage, and those which are based on conflicting Traditions from the early authorities. These three kinds have been indicated respectively by 'L', 'R' or 'T' within square brackets.

Some of Ṭabarī's arguments reflect a more oral style, and these are introduced as straightforward 'questions' or 'objections', and 'replies'.

★ ★ ★

The transliteration of the text of the Qur'ān presents several problems. An alphabetic transliteration, as followed in this translation for single words or short phrases in Arabic—names, titles of books, single words, non-Qur'ānic phrases, etc.—, is unsatisfactory, as the principal reason for transliterating the Qur'ān is to give indications for its pronunciation. On the other hand, a purely phonetic transcription encounters

the problems raised by *tajwīd*, the art of Qur'ānic recitation, and its complex phonological rules. The decision has been taken in the case of this translation to steer a middle course, giving a certain degree of phonetic guidance.

Consonants are transcribed according to the transliteration table. Consonantal assimilations are not marked in the transliteration. In the case of the definite article, *al-*, this means that the reader should remember that when it prefaces words beginning with the so-called *shamsī* (=sun) letters, the *lām* (-l-) becomes assimilated to the following letter, which is then pronounced as a double consonant, e.g., *al-tafṣīr* is pronounced *attafṣīr*. The *lām* remains in the Arabic written form, and this doubling is sometimes indicated by a *tashdīd* (ˆ) over the first letter, e.g., الشمس. The *shamsī* letters are: *t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, ṣ, ḍ, ṭ, ẓ, l, n*. Another common assimilation occurs with the letters *r, l, m, w, y*, when they directly follow a word ending in an unvowelled *n*; this frequently occurs with such combinations as *min mā* (*mimmā*) and *'an man* (*'amman*).

Vowels are transliterated according to the table, and, with one exception, there is no attempt to render them phonetically correct where this would require a deviation from an alphabetic transcription. The exception is when a long vowel directly precedes a connective *alif* (*alif al-waṣl*) and becomes a short vowel in pronunciation; in this case the vowel is written as short in the transliteration, and the absorption of the *alif* into the vowel is marked by an apostrophe, e.g., *fi 'l-ḥayāt*, instead of *fi l-ḥayāt* (في الحياة), which is pronounced *filḥayāt*. Other phonetic modifications of the alphabet required by the rules of prosody and *tajwīd* have not been taken into account.

A few points about Arabic grammar need to be mentioned, for in several places the understanding of Ṭabarī's text depends on grammatical points not encountered in English. Arabic grammar divides words into three categories: verbs, nouns, and particles. Of these, the verbs and nouns are the most important from a structural point of view, for particles form a class on their own and are not modified by their place in a sentence. From a morphological point of view, grammarians have taken verbs and nouns to be based on roots, which consist of a certain number of radical letters. The great majority of roots are trilateral, i.e., they contain three radical letters, although some are quadrilateral. From these roots are derived the verbal and nominal forms by doubling letters or by the addition of vowels and certain consonants. In theory, fifteen possible verb forms exist for trilateral

verbs (quadrilateral verbs having four possible derived forms), numbered in European grammars and dictionaries according to the roman numerals I to XV, although in practice forms IX and XI to XV are rare, and for each root the actual number of forms in use is considerably restricted. Arab grammarians take the 3rd person singular of the verb *fa'ala* (=he does) as the paradigm of the 1st form verb, and construct similar paradigms for the other verbal forms from the same root (*f- ' - l*).

Each of these verb forms has a semantic quality associated with it which transforms the meaning of the first form verb in a particular way. For example, the *vth* form (*tafa''ala*) commonly carries a reflexive or effective signification, that of something happening to the subject, either through itself or through something else.

Arabic has masculine and feminine but no neuter, and, as well as singular and plural, it has a dual form. Although verbs do not have tenses in the strict sense of the word, corresponding to a past, present, and future relation between the speaker and the action of the verb, they do have indicative temporal forms which relate to the state of the action itself, either finished (the 'perfect') or unfinished (the 'imperfect'). In general, however, the perfect tends to be used to express actions in the past, while the imperfect expresses actions in the present or the future. Although there is no future tense as such, its function is often performed by particles which are added to the beginning of the imperfect verb; but usually the context by itself is sufficient to show that the imperfect indicates future time, in much the same way as the present continuous often does in English. There are active and passive voices, and, as well as an imperative, there is a subjunctive and a jussive mood (there are also two energetic moods, although these are rarely used).

Each of the verbal forms, in its turn, gives rise to a number of nouns and adjectives according to certain morphological rules. There being no infinitive as we know it, its place in grammar is taken by the verbal noun proper, which is called in Arabic the *maṣḍar*, and which denotes the action or state indicated by the corresponding verb. Then there are forms which denote the agent of the action and the person or thing to whom the action is done, which, although they are nouns, are similar to active and passive participles; in the paradigm 1st form these are *fā'il* and *maf'ūl* respectively. Among other derived nominal forms are those expressing the place, the time, and the instrument of an action. Arabic dictionaries are arranged according to the principle that the verb is the etymological basis of all words, so that, in order to find a noun, one generally has to first look up the verb from which it is derived. This

applies not only to derived forms like those above in which a letter or letters have been added to the basic verbal form, but also to common, proper, and collective nouns which are primitive in form, i.e., they do not contain extra letters. Philologists use this process in reverse to trace a verb or noun in which they are interested back to a simple 1st form verb, and to analyse its meaning in terms of the root meaning plus the semantic modifications of its typical morphology. This is what Ṭabarī is doing in the various places in which he talks about the 'original' or 'root' meaning (*aṣl*) of a word.

The majority of nouns are, in the singular, triptotes, having three case-endings: a nominative, an accusative and vocative, and a third form which acts as a genitive and is also used after prepositions. These endings are respectively *-u*, *-a*, and *-i*. Some nouns, particularly certain plurals and proper nouns of foreign origin, are diptotes, and only have the *-u* and *-a* endings. There is a dual, which has two case-endings, and a sound plural, likewise with two case endings, but some nouns have what is called a broken plural, which may be a triptote or a diptote. A sound plural is formed by the addition of *-ūn(a)* (nom.) or *-īn(a)* (acc. and gen.) for the masculine, and of *āt(u)* (nom.) and *āt(i)* for the feminine, to the singular, but in the case of the broken plural the internal structure of the word itself is changed by the addition of vowels and certain consonants. A definite noun is indicated by suffixing the article (*al-*), and the indefinite is indicated in the case of triptotes by the addition of a final *-n*, a process known as nunation. Adjectives follow the same structural rules as nouns.

There are no adverbs in Arabic, but their places is taken by certain accusative constructions. For example, adverbs of time and place may be expressed by an accusative noun, e.g., *yaum(an)* (=one day), *yamīn(an)* (= [to the] right), or by compound expressions involving the accusative, e.g., *taḥta 'l-shajaratī* (=under the tree). The state, or condition, (*hāl*) of the subject and/or object while the action is taking place is also expressed by the accusative, or else by a complete proposition.

* * *

In this translation, the English version of the verses of the Qur'ān follows, predominantly, that of Arberry (Qur'ān [1964]) except, of course, when this is at variance with Ṭabarī's commentary and his preferred interpretation; occasionally Pickthall's translation (Qur'ān

[1930]) has been preferred. The second of these translations has become something of a standard for English-speaking Muslims, since it was approved by the authorities of the al-Azhar university in Cairo, but the first has the advantage of a somewhat easier English style. Another English version worth mentioning here is that of Sale (Qur'ān [1734]), which was based on Baiḍāwī's commentary.

The standard work on the Qur'ān by European scholars has for long been the *Geschichte des Qorāns*, begun by the nineteenth century German scholar Theodor Nöldeke and revised and completed by his pupil Friedrich Schwally and two scholars of the next generation, Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl. First published in 1860, it was not until 1932 that the work appeared in its final form (Nöldeke [1932]). But for the English-speaking reader, the most approachable work on the Qur'ān is probably Bell's *Introduction to the Qur'an* in Professor W. Montgomery Watt's revision (Bell and Watt [1970]).

For the life of Muḥammad, the reader can turn to the English translation of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* (Ibn Ishāq [1955]), but its length makes it of restricted use for general purposes except as a reference book. A recent biography, which is based on traditional sources, is that by Martin Lings (Lings [1981]).

In addition to these comprehensive works, the reader will find the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (*E.I.*^I, and *E.I.*^{II}) a very informative source with useful bibliographies. Another recent source containing articles and bibliographies relating to several topics that the reader of this commentary may wish to pursue is the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* (Beeston [1983]), which has a thorough listing of translations of the Qur'ān.

¹ See *Intro.*, p. 12 and n. 15.

² See Ṭabarī (1879). The whole of this work is in the process of being translated into English, and so far three volumes have appeared; see Ṭabarī (1985).

³ A manuscript of this work is kept in the library of al-Azhar in Cairo, although its attribution to Ṭabarī is doubtful; see Sezgin (1967), p. 328, n. 9.

⁴ Ṭabarī mentions this work in *Exeg.* 2: 70 (p. 385), where he refers to a part of it called the *Kitāb al-Risāla* in a discussion of a topic from *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

⁵ Parts of this work exist in modern editions; see Ṭabarī (1902, 1933).

⁶ See Sourdel (1968).

⁷ For Ṭabarī's biography, see, e.g., Yāqūt (1907), IV, 423–62.

⁸ This is as given on the cover and the title page of the edition used in the first volume of this translation. However, on the half-title page before the text the editors give *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an wujūh ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. Other editions give the title as *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. For the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, see pp. xxvii–xxviii. The present translation uses the scholarly edition of the text established by the brothers Maḥmūd and Aḥmad Shākir (see Ṭabarī [1969]); for convenience, this edition is referred to throughout by 'Sh. & Sh.' followed by the volume and page numbers.

- ⁹ See, e.g., *Intro.*, p. 9 and n. 10., pp. 32-4.
¹⁰ See Abū 'Ubaida (1955).
¹¹ See al-Farrā' (1955).
¹² See, e.g., *Exeg.* 1: 3, p. 66.
¹³ References in the notes are to Professor A. Guillaume's translation (Ibn Ishāq [1955]).
¹⁴ See *Intro.*, pp. 24-7.
¹⁵ These improvements to the Arabic script are generally attributed to al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (c. 41/661-95/714), the famous Umayyad governor of 'Irāq, who sponsored a new text which he declared to be the only valid one.
¹⁶ See Zamakhsharī (1967).
¹⁷ See Rāzī (n. d.).
¹⁸ See Baiḍāwī (1846). Parts of his commentary have been translated into English; see Baiḍāwī (1894, 1964).
¹⁹ See Qurṭubī (1967).
²⁰ See Maḥallī (1965).
²¹ See Suyūṭī (1967).
²² See Tūsī (1957).
²³ See Ṭabarsī (1954).
²⁴ This has been published under various titles; see, e.g., Ibn al-'Arabī (1968).
²⁵ See Abduh (1928).
²⁶ See Quṭb (1975). This commentary has been translated into English; see Quṭb (1979).
²⁷ See Ṭabarī (1983).
²⁸ See above, n. 8.

APPENDIX

The list of contents of *Al-Itqān*,
 as given in Suyūṭī (1967), pt. I, 14-17.

- 1 Knowledge of the Meccan and Medinan 'parts of the Qur'ān'.
- 2 Knowledge of 'the parts sent down' while 'the Prophet was' settled and 'the parts sent down' while 'he was' travelling.
- 3 'The parts sent down' during the day and during the night.
- 4 'The parts sent down' in summer and in winter.
- 5 'The parts sent down while the Prophet was' in bed and 'while he was' asleep.
- 6 'The revelation' on earth and in heaven.
- 7 The first 'part' to be sent down.
- 8 The last 'part' to be sent down.
- 9 The causes of the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).
- 10 That which was sent down through the speech of one of the Companions.
- 11 That which was sent down more than once.
- 12 Where the legal precept came after the revelation, and where the revelation came after the legal precept.
- 13 Knowledge of what was sent down separately and what was sent down in combination.
- 14 That which was sent down accompanied 'by many angels', and that which was sent down alone 'with only Gabriel'.
- 15 Those 'parts' of it which were sent down to certain 'previous' prophets, and those 'parts' which were not sent down to anyone before the Prophet.
- 16 The way in which the Qur'ān was sent down.
- 17 Knowledge of the names of 'the Qur'ān' and of the suras.
- 18 The collection and ordering of 'the Qur'ān'.
- 19 Concerning the number of suras, verses, words, and letters.
- 20 Those who memorized it, and those who transmitted it.
- 21 Concerning 'the classification of the chains of transmission into' 'high' ('*ālī*, =very few links in the chain between the transmitter and the Prophet, hence more reliable) and 'low' (*nāzil*, =many such links, and hence not so reliable).
- 22 Knowledge of the *mutawātīr* 'recitations' (=transmitted by so many trustworthy persons as to be beyond doubt).
- 23 'Knowledge of' the *mashhūr* 'recitations' (=transmitted by more than two transmitters, they may or may not therefore be authentic).

- 24 'Knowledge of' the *āḥād* 'recitations' (=transmitted from too few transmitters to make them *mutawātir*).
- 25 'Knowledge of' the *shādhdh* 'recitations' (=those which are at variance with accepted recitations).
- 26 'Knowledge of' the *mauḍū'* (=fictitious) 'recitations'.
- 27 'Knowledge of' the *mudraj* 'recitations' (=recitations with unacknowledged insertions into the text or the *isnād*).
- 28 Knowledge of 'where to' pause and 'where to' commence 'in recitation'.
- 29 Concerning words which are joined where the meaning is interrupted.
- 30 Pronunciation of the *fatha* ()—its shading between 'e' (*imāla*) and 'a'.
- 31 Assimilation of a consonant into a preceding 'n' (*idghām*), absence of consonantal modification after an 'n' (*iḡhār*), 'concealment' (*ikhfā'*, =slight modification after an 'n'), substitution of an 'm' for an 'n' before a 'b' (*iqḷāb*).
- 32 Prolongation (*madd*) and shortening (*qasr*) of the vowel.
- 33 Lightening the glottal stop (*hamza*).
- 34 Conditions for becoming a 'bearer' of 'the Qur'ān, i.e., how to learn and memorize the Qur'ān correctly'.
- 35 The correct behaviour concerning recitation 'of the Qur'ān'.
- 36 'Knowledge of' rare words.
- 37 The occurrence in 'the Qur'ān' of words not in the dialect of the Hijaz.
- 38 The occurrence in 'the Qur'ān' of words not in the Arabic language.
- 39 Knowledge of homonyms (*al-wujūh wa-'l-naẓā'ir*).
- 40 Knowledge of the meanings of key-words which the commentator needs 'to know'.
- 41 Knowledge of desinential inflexions (*i'rāb*).
- 42 Concerning important 'linguistic' rules which the commentator needs to know.
- 43 Concerning the clear (*muḥkam*) and the obscure (*mutashābih*) 'passages' in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 44 Concerning hysteron proteron (=where the syntactic order differs from the semantic order) 'in the Qur'ān'.
- 45 Concerning terms with general, and terms with particular, meanings 'in the Qur'ān'.
- 46 Concerning synopsis and clear meaning 'in the Qur'ān'.
- 47 Concerning the abrogating and abrogated 'passages' in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 48 Concerning difficult 'passages' in 'the Qur'ān' which give the illusion of inconsistency and contradiction.
- 49 Concerning what is qualified and what is unqualified in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 50 Concerning what has explicit, and what has implicit, meaning in 'the Qur'ān'.

- 51 Concerning the styles of address 'used' in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 52 Concerning literal and figurative meaning in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 53 Concerning comparison (*tashbīh*) and metaphor (*isti'āra*) in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 54 Concerning metonymy (*kināya*) and allusion (*ta'rīd*) in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 55 Concerning limitation and particularization 'of meaning'.
- 56 Concerning concision and prolixity.
- 57 Concerning informative and performative 'expressions'.
- 58 Concerning the stylistic originality of the Qur'ān.
- 59 Concerning the division of the verses.
- 60 Concerning the openings of the suras.
- 61 Concerning the endings of the suras.
- 62 Concerning correspondences 'which occur in' the verses and 'in' the suras.
- 63 Concerning verses which closely resemble one another.
- 64 Concerning the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān.
- 65 Concerning knowledge derived from the Qur'ān.
- 66 Concerning parables in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 67 Concerning oaths in 'the Qur'ān'.
- 68 Concerning the dialectic of 'the Qur'ān'.
- 69 Concerning names, agnomens, 'and' surnames 'mentioned in the Qur'ān'.
- 70 Concerning elliptical expressions 'in which groups of people, some of whose members are known, are mentioned'.
- 71 Concerning the names of those concerning whom 'parts of' the Qur'ān were sent down.
- 72 Concerning the excellences of the Qur'ān.
- 73 Concerning the most excellent parts of the Qur'ān and their virtues.
- 74 Concerning the unique 'passages' in the Qur'ān.
- 75 Concerning the special qualities of 'the Qur'ān'.
- 76 Concerning orthography, and the correct way to write 'the Qur'ān'.
- 77 Concerning knowledge of its exegesis (*ta'wīl*) and its commentary (*tafsīr*), the exposition of its nobility and the necessity for it.
- 78 Concerning the conditions 'to be fulfilled by' the commentator, and the correct behaviour 'he should display'.
- 79 The curiosities of *tafsīr*.
- 80 The generations of commentators (=Companions, Followers, etc.).

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SIGLA

- ¶ Ṭabarī's paraphrase of all or part of a verse.
- § translator's summary of a part of Ṭabarī's text.
- ⇒ Ṭabarī's chain of transmission omitted; only the source authority given.
- [999] refers to numbered *ḥadīth* in the Sh. & Sh. edition.
- [L], [R], [T] Recitational, Linguistic, or Traditional difference of opinion between authorities.
- « » Qur'ānic quotations.
- (...) (i) in text, passage(s) omitted and not summarized; *ḥadīth*(s) may or may not be included in the omission.
(ii) in a *ḥadīth*, repetition of 'He (i.e., the source authority) said:' omitted.
- (..) one or more *ḥadīths* omitted.
- ‡ quotation(s) of poetry omitted.
- ┐ ┌ translator's addition.
- ★ join between two verses.
- * textual footnote.
- ¹, ², ³, etc. end of verse notes.

THE
COMMENTARY
ON THE
QUR'ĀN

TRANSLITERATION

CONSONANTS

ا	<i>alif</i>		ض	<i>ḍād</i>	ḍ
ب	<i>bā'</i>	b	ط	<i>ṭā'</i>	ṭ
ت	<i>tā'</i>	t	ظ	<i>ẓā'</i>	ẓ
ث	<i>thā'</i>	th	ع	<i>'ayn</i>	'
ج	<i>jīm</i>	j	غ	<i>ghayn</i>	gh
ح	<i>ḥā'</i>	ḥ	ف	<i>fā'</i>	f
خ	<i>khā'</i>	kh	ق	<i>qāf</i>	q
د	<i>dāl</i>	d	ك	<i>kāf</i>	k
ذ	<i>dhāl</i>	dh	ل	<i>lām</i>	l
ر	<i>rā'</i>	r	م	<i>mīm</i>	m
ز	<i>zay</i>	z	ن	<i>nūn</i>	n
س	<i>sīn</i>	s	ه	<i>hā'</i>	h
ش	<i>shīn</i>	sh	و	<i>wāw</i>	w
ص	<i>ṣād</i>	ṣ	ي	<i>yā'</i>	y

(ء *hamza* ')

VOWELS

ا	<i>ā</i>	ـَ	<i>fatha</i>	a
و	<i>ū</i>	ـُ	<i>ḍamma</i>	u
ي	<i>ī</i>	ـِ	<i>kasra</i>	i

' = assimilated vowel

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

INTRODUCTION

What follows was read back to
Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī
in the year 306 「of the *hijra*」.¹

PRAISE be to Allāh, Whose incomparable wisdom intuitive minds are compelled to recognize, Whose subtle arguments triumph in disputes created by discursive minds, Whose work, which is the creation in all its splendour, reduces to nothing the justifications put forward by the tongues of atheists, Whose proofs 「of His own Being」 call out to men of learning the witness that: He is Allāh, there is no other god but He. He has no peer equalling Him, nor anyone similar resembling Him, nor any partner assisting Him; He has no son, no father, no consort, not a single equal.²

Laudation
to God

He is the absolute Dominator, and tyrants are forced to submit to His might. He is All-powerful: the most august kings bend before His Omnipotence, and those who cause men to tremble with fear humble themselves before the reverential dread His Authority inspires. The whole of creation yields in obedience to Him, whether willingly or by force, as God 「Himself」, may His praise be glorified and His Names sanctified, has said: «To God bow all who are in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the mornings and the evenings.» (13: 15)

Every existant thing announces His Unicity, every sensible thing is a guide towards His divinity, through the marks of creation with which He has branded them—decrease and increase, impotence and needfulness, susceptibility to accidental facts, and subjection to inevitable incidents—in order that to Him shall belong the decisive proof.

Then He completed these indications of His which bore witness to Him, and confirmed the effulgence of His splendour in the hearts 「of men」, through Messengers³ whom he sent to whomsoever He wished of His servants. His Messengers call the people to that whose truth has become evident to them and whose proof has become firmly established in 「their」 minds, «so that mankind might have no argument against God after the

Eulogy
of the
Messengers

Messengers» (4: 165), so that those possessed of discernment and intelligence might reflect. He has aided them with His Assistance, distinguished them from other men by proof attesting to their truthfulness, and by supporting them through decisive arguments and inimitable signs, in order that none might be able to say: «This is naught but a mortal like yourselves, who eats of what you eat and drinks of what you drink. If you obey a mortal like yourselves, then you will be losers.» (23: 33)

He has made these Messengers ambassadors (*sufarā'*) between Himself and His creatures, and the trustees of His Revelation. He has accorded them His special favour, and has chosen them for His Message. He has placed them in different ranks and various spiritual stations through the gifts which He has bestowed on each one of them, and through the marks of honour with which He has favoured them. He has raised some of them above others according to distinct ranks competing in excellence. He has honoured one of them with the divine Speech which He has addressed to him, and with the intimate communication; and He has honoured another among them with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and with the authorization to raise the dead and to cure the infirm and the blind.⁴

«Finally,¹ He has accorded to our prophet, Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, the supreme degree, the highest rank, the most excellent share of His generosity, the most abundant portion of the degrees of prophethood, and the greatest number of followers and companions. He has sent him with the complete Call 'to follow the right path' and the universal Message; He has guarded him and protected him uniquely against every wilful tyrant and rebel satan. Thus, through 'our prophet', He has made apparent the true religion (*al-dīn*),⁵ made clear the path to follow, explained the waymarks of truth, and extinguished the beacons of polytheism; through him falsehood has come to nothing, and the errancy and deceptions of Satan, and idolatry and paganism, have faded away.

«Our prophet¹ has been confirmed with a proof which will abide for 'all' time, will remain constant throughout 'all' ages and epochs, and will endure the passage of the months and the years, its light becoming more brilliant as time goes by, and more radiant as night and day succeed each other. 'This has been conferred' as a special favour from God for him in preference to all His other Messengers—whom tyrants defeated and profligate nations despised, so that the traces of them were

Eulogy of
the prophet
Muḥammad

obliterated after them, and 'the succession' of night and day caused them to be forgotten—'in preference to' those of them who had been sent to one nation rather than another, to an elite rather than to the people at large, to one group rather than to all people.

Praise be to God, Who has accorded us the honour of being able to recognize his truthfulness, and has made us among those who attest and have faith in him and in what he called to and brought. May God bestow on him and his Family His most pure blessing, His most surpassing peace and a most perfect salute.

The most significant excellence which God granted the Community of our prophet, Muḥammad, the greatest rank and pre-eminence with which He ennobled them above 'all' other communities, the most resplendent mark of honour He granted them, is the preservation of His Revelation,⁶ which He caused to descend upon him. He made this Revelation a proof of the truth of the prophethood of their prophet, a clear sign and an eloquent argument for the favour which He has bestowed upon him, may God bless him and grant him peace. Through this Revelation He has unambiguously distinguished him from all liars and impostors, and has made clear the distinction between 'his followers' and every repudiator, atheist, infidel, and polytheist. If all the beings of the world of jinn and men, great or small, were to unite in order to produce a single sura comparable to this Revelation, they would not be able to do so, even if they were to back each other 'in the task'.⁷

The Qur'ān,
the preserved
Revelation

He made this Revelation a brilliant light in the obscurity of ignorance, a lustrous star in the twilight of uncertainty, a sure guide against wandering in the ways of confusion, and a leader on the paths to salvation and truth, «whereby God guides whosoever follows His good pleasure in the ways of peace, and brings them forth from the shadows into the light by His leave; and He guides them to a straight path.» (5:16) . . . Its pillars will 'never' crumble, its way-marks will 'never' be obliterated by the span of time; he who follows it will not deviate from the goal of the path, he who journeys with it will not wander from the way of guidance; he who complies with its directions will attain success and will be well directed, but he who strays will take the wrong turning and lose his way.

'This Revelation' is the refuge to which 'those who are guided by it' repair in case of differences; it is the stronghold to which they resort in times of adversity, the fortress in which they entrench themselves against the whisperings of Satan, the wisdom of their Lord in which

they seek arbitration, the 'binding' decision of His judgement between them to which they ultimately have recourse and in accordance with which they act; 'it is' His cable by clinging to which they are saved from destruction.⁸

* * *

O my God, grant us Your providential help so that we may attain soundness in our discourse on the Revelation, both the unambiguous 'parts' which have a specific commentary and the complex 'parts' which admit of ambiguous interpretations, 'the parts' which deal with what is lawful and those which deal with what is unlawful, 'the parts' with universal application and those with particular relevance, 'the parts' which are summary and those which are fully explained, 'the parts' which abrogate as well as those which are abrogated, 'the parts' whose meaning is apparent, as well as those whose meaning is concealed, . . . and also in the exegesis of its difficult passages.

O my God, inspire us with a firm devotion to 'this Revelation' so that we may have recourse 'only' to its unambiguous parts, while being firm in submission to the obscure parts, 'not seeking definitive interpretations for them'.⁹

O my God, endow us with the Grace to be able to thank You for having bestowed on us the power to memorize 'the Revelation' and knowledge of the sacred norms it establishes.

Verily, You hear 'our' supplication and are ever ready to answer.

May the blessing of God and His abundant peace be upon our master, Muḥammad, and his Family.

* * *

Know, O servants of God, may He bestow Mercy upon you, that the most worthy thing to which your attention can be directed, and knowledge of which leads to the ultimate goal, is that subject whose science is approved by God, and which directs the possessor of its science on the path of correct guidance. That which brings together all this for him who desires it is the Book of God «wherein is no doubt» (2: 2), and about whose revelation there is no dispute, the reciter of which will gain abundant provisions 'for the next world' and a magnificent reward.

Knowledge
of the Book
of God

«Falsehood comes not to it from before it nor from behind it; a sending down from One All-wise, All-laudable.» (41: 42)

As for us, in setting forth its interpretation and clarifying its meanings and significations, we shall, God willing, compose a comprehensive book, which will incorporate everything which people need to know about this Book, and which will surpass all other books on this subject. In all of this we shall state whatever consensus has come down to us where there has been agreement concerning 'the Book of God', as well as disagreement where this has occurred, establishing the reasoning of each of the schools of thought among them, and 'finally' indicating in the most succinct and brief manner possible that which seems to us to be correct.¹⁰

We ask for God's help, 'and pray' that He may grant us success in that which draws near those whom He loves and repels those who are the object of His Wrath. May God bless the most perfect one in His creation and his Family, and grant them abundant peace. The first task to which we shall address ourselves is 'the setting down of' a clear explanation of those meanings in the verses of the Qur'ān which could cause confusion for those who have not exerted the utmost effort to discipline themselves in the sciences 'which concern' the Arabic language, and who have not acquired an ingrained knowledge of the multifarious aspects of the linguistic devices employed by those who speak the language with a natural and instinctive eloquence.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE CONFORMITY
OF THE MEANINGS OF THE VERSES OF THE QUR'ĀN
TO THE MEANINGS OF THE SPEECH OF THOSE
IN WHOSE LANGUAGE IT WAS SENT DOWN

AND A DEMONSTRATION THAT THIS COMES FORTH
FROM AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING WISDOM
ON THE PART OF GOD, EXALTED IS HIS MENTION

TOGETHER WITH AN EXPOSITION
OF THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE MEANING BY WHICH
THE QUR'ĀN IS SET APART FROM ALL OTHER SPEECH

One of the greatest favours which God has granted His servants, one of the most precious gifts which He has accorded His creatures, is 'His' bestowal of the benefit of clarity of discourse (*bayān*),¹¹ through which they express what is hidden within their hearts and indicate what their

souls intend. Thereby He smoothed the coarseness of their tongues, and eased what they found difficult. Then they declared His oneness by means of it, and glorified and revered Him; and they satisfied their needs with it, and conversed with one another, getting to know each other and to work together.

Then He appointed them to 'differing' categories with respect to what He had bestowed upon them, and raised them in degrees above each other: from the eloquent speaker, fluent and unhesitating, to the faltering speaker, voicing himself indistinctly, inarticulately, un'able to' express what is in his heart. He caused the highest rank of them in this, the most outstanding degree among them, to be the most fluent of them in what they wanted to say, the most eloquent in expressing themselves. Then, in His Revelation and the unambiguous verses of His Book, He made known to them the favour of clarity of discourse which He had bestowed on them by which He gave them pre-eminence over the dumb and inarticulate. He said «What, one who is reared among ornaments, and is unclear (*ghairu mubīn*) in dispute.» (43: 18)....

There can be no doubt that the highest and most resplendent degree of eloquence is that which expresses itself with the greatest clarity, making the intention of the speaker evident and facilitating the hearer's understanding. But when it rises beyond this level 'of eloquence', and transcends what man is capable of, so that none of the servants 'of God' is able to match it, it becomes a proof and a sign for the Messengers of the One, the All-powerful. It is then the counterpart of the raising of the dead and the curing of lepers and the blind, themselves proofs and signs for 'the Messengers' because they transcended the realm of the highest attainments of man's medicine and therapy, beyond the capability of 'the creatures of' all the worlds....

Since things are as we have described them, it is obvious that there is no clear discourse more eloquent, no wisdom more profound, no speech more sublime, no form of expression more noble, than 'this' clear discourse and speech with which a single man challenged a people at a time when they were acknowledged masters of the art of oratory and rhetoric, poetry and prose, rhymed prose and soothsaying.¹² He reduced their fancy to folly and demonstrated the inadequacy of their logic. He dissociated himself from their religion and summoned all of them to follow him, accept 'his Mission', testify to its truth, and affirm that he was the Messenger sent to them by their Lord. He let them know that the demonstration of the truth of what he said, the proof of the genuineness of his prophethood, was the *bayān*—the clear

discourse—, the *hikma*—the wisdom—, the *furqān*—the discriminator between truth and falsehood—,¹³ which he conveyed to them in a language like their language, in a speech whose meanings conformed to the meanings of their speech. Then he told them all that they were incapable of bringing anything comparable to 'even' a part of 'what he had brought', and that they lacked the power to do this. They all confessed their inability, voluntarily acknowledging the truth of 'what he had brought', and bore witness to their own insufficiency; 'all, that is,' except someone who pretended, through haughtiness, not to understand or to see, and attempted to undertake that of which he knew he was incapable. Thus he revealed the weakness of his mind which had been hitherto concealed, . . . and merely produced what even a feeble fool can produce. . . .¹⁴

In fact, the excellence of God's clarity of discourse over the discourse of all His creatures is comparable to His excellence over all His servants. Since this is the case, and since it is impossible for any one of us to communicate by addressing someone else in a way which the other cannot understand, it is obvious that it would not be permissible for 'God' to address any one of His creatures other than in a way that he could understand. . . . «We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them.» (14: 4) . . . «And We have not sent down upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that whereon they were at variance, and as a guidance and as a mercy to a people who believe.» (16: 64)

The superiority
of the divine *bayān*
over ordinary
human speech

. . . It must therefore follow . . . , since the Book of God, which He sent down to our prophet, Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, was in 'his' language, and since 'his' language was Arabic, that the Qur'ān is in Arabic; and this is quite clearly stated in the Revelation of our Lord where He says: «We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān; haply you will understand» (12: 2), and «Truly it is the Revelation of the Lord of all Beings, brought down by the Faithful Spirit upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners, in a clear, Arabic tongue.» (26: 192-5) . . .

Since what we have said is clearly correct, . . . it necessarily follows that the meanings of the Book of God which was sent down to our prophet . . . must agree with the meanings of the speech of the Arabs, and that its ostensive sense must concur with the ostensive sense of their speech, even if the Book of God is set apart from it by the sublimity

with which it surpasses all other speech and discourse, as we have already described.

Since this is the case, it is clear that there will be found in the Book of God which was revealed to His prophet, Muḥammad, those rhetorical devices which are to be found in the speech of the Arabs: the use of ellipsis and brachylogy, and the employment of veiled instead of clear expression, of minimal instead of extended speech, in some places; the use of extended expression and added words, of repetition and varied expressions for the same meaning, the setting out of meanings by non-circumlocutory expressions, and the concealing 'of intended meanings' with cryptic expressions, in other places; synecdoche of the particular for the general and vice versa; metalepsis of an indirect expression for a direct expression; substitution of the description for the thing described and vice versa; hysteron proteron, the inversion of logical order; synecdoche of the part for the whole; the replacement of an ellipsis with a clear expression, and the bringing out of what has been omitted. We shall explain all of this in 'the appropriate' places, if God wills it and I am aided by support and strength from Him.

EXPLANATION OF THE EXPRESSIONS
COMMON TO BOTH ARABIC AND THE LANGUAGES
OF SOME OTHER DIVISIONS OF MANKIND

OBJECTION: You have just stated that it would not be permissible for God to address any one of His creatures in any way that he could not understand, or to send him a Message which was not in a language with which he was familiar. 'So what is your explanation of the following Traditions?'¹⁵

⇒ Abū Mūsā 'al-Ash'arī, concerning «He will give you *kiflāni* from His mercy» (57: 28):

'The dual noun' *al-kiflān* means 'double recompense' in Ethiopic. [1]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās,¹⁶ concerning «surely the first part of the night (*nāshi'ata 'l-laili*)» (73: 6):

In Ethiopic, when a man gets up during the night, they say *nasha'a*. [2]

⇒ Abū Maisara, concerning «O you mountains, glorify ('*auwibī*) 'God' with him» (34: 10):

'*Auwibī* means' 'glorify' in Ethiopic. [3]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, on being asked about «fleeing before a lion (*qaswara*)» (74: 51):

'The lion' is called *asad* in Arabic, *shīr* in Persian, *ariyā* in Nabatean, and *qaswara* in Ethiopic. [4]

⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair:

The 'tribe of the' Quraish said: 'Why was this Qur'ān not sent down in a foreign language (*a'jamiyan*) as well as in Arabic?' Whereupon God sent down 'this verse: '«They say: 'Why are its signs not set forth in a foreign language and in Arabic?' Say: 'To the believers it is a guidance and a healing.'» (41: 44) ... [5]

⇒ Abū Maisara:

There are 'expressions' in the Qur'ān from every language. [6]

And 'there are many' Traditions similar to these which, if we were to quote them, would unnecessarily lengthen this book, and which indicate that there are 'expressions' in the Qur'ān which are not from the Arabic language.

REPLY: What these 'authorities' have related does not contradict what we have just said, since they did not say that these expressions, or expressions similar to them, do not exist in the speech of the Arabs. 'Nor did they say' that they were not part of 'the Arabs' way of speaking before the Qur'ān was sent down, or that they did not know them before the advent of the Qur'ān. For in that case there would indeed be a contradiction between what they relate and what we say. All that some of them said was that such-and-such an expression means such-and-such in Ethiopic, and that another expression means something else in Persian. We do not deny that there may be some utterances which agree in the speech of the peoples of all different tongues and which have one and the same meaning, let alone that 'such might be the case between' just two linguistic communities. Indeed, we find such agreement common in different languages that we know; for example, *dirham*, *dīnār*, *dawāt* (=ink-pot), *qalam* (=pen), *qirṭās* (=paper), and so on ... , where Persian and Arabic agree in word and meaning.¹⁷ Quite possibly it is the same in other languages which we do not know how to speak

OBJECTION: Suppose someone were to say, concerning what we

have just stated about the agreement in word and meaning in Persian and Arabic between the expressions we have just enumerated, and between similar expressions we have refrained from mentioning: 'All of these are Persian and not Arabic'; or 'All of these are Arabic and not Persian.' Or 'suppose' he were to say: 'Some of these are Arabic and some Persian'; or 'They were originally Arabic, and then spread and became current in Persian'; or 'They were originally Persian, and then spread to the Arabs and were Arabicized.'

REPLY: 'We should deem this person to be' unlearned, because the

Some words
may belong
equally to
more than
one language

Arabs have no more right to claim that the origin of an expression lies with them rather than with the Persians than do the Persians to claim the origin lies with them rather than with the Arabs. 'The only certain fact is that' the expression is employed with the same wording and

the same meaning by two linguistic groups. Since the matter is as we have described . . . , 'there can be no good grounds for' one of these groups to claim that the origin lies with them rather than with the other group. . . . 'He who claims this' is claiming something whose soundness could only be established on the basis of a Tradition which led to sure knowledge and eliminated doubt, and whose genuineness cut short any uncertainty.

In our opinion the correct approach to this question is to call 'these expressions' Arabo-Persian or Arabo-Ethiopic, since the two 'linguistic' communities use them as they use the other 'words in their' discourse and speech. It is the same with every 'part of' speech and noun for which different communities have the same word with the same meaning, and which is found to be used in each 'community' in the same way as is the rest of their language. . . .

This then is the meaning 'intended by' those from whom we narrated opinion's' about 'various' expressions . . . at the beginning of this section—where one of them related an 'expression' to Ethiopic, another 'related' one to Persian, 'etc.'—, for someone who relates any one of these 'expressions' to whatever he relates it to does not 'thereby' . . . deny that it is Arabic, nor does someone who says that one of them is Arabic deny that it is justifiably related to 'another language' An affirmation indicates a negation in the case of meanings which cannot be combined with it 'because they are contradictory', as when someone says 'So-and-so is standing', which indicates that he is not sitting down, and so forth However, 'when a meaning' is distinct from the

meaning 'of the affirmation' it can be combined with it; this is like when someone says 'So-and-so is standing and talking to so-and-so', for there is nothing in the affirmation of his standing which indicates that he cannot be talking to someone else, since it is permissible for 'these two meanings' to be combined at the same time in a single individual. . . . It is the same with what we said about the expressions we mentioned, and others like them, 'i.e., that' it was not impossible that some of them were both Arabic and Persian, or Ethiopic and Arabic, if they were used in both communities. So it is correct, and not false, to relate these 'expressions' . . . to either one of the communities or to both of them. . . .¹⁸

§ Ṭabarī raises a hypothetical objection that it is wrong to attribute a word or expression to more than one linguistic community in the same way as it is wrong to say that a human being has two genealogies. Genealogies, he says in refutation, quoting «Call them after their fathers; that is more equitable before God» (33: 5), are to be traced through only one genetic strand, but such is not the case with a linguistic expression where the criterion is merely whether a certain community uses it or not; with such a criterion, it is quite possible for more than one community to lay claim to it. Similarly, he says, if a region is between the coast and the mountains, it is equally correct to call the climate maritime, or montane, or both, since neither of these descriptions contradicts the other.

It is therefore quite incorrect for anyone with sound judgement, who recognizes the truth of the Book of God and recites it, and who is acquainted with God's normative limits, to believe that one part of the Qur'ān is Persian and not Arabic, another Nabatean and not Arabic . . . , and another Ethiopic and not Arabic, after what God has stated about it, that He made it an Arabic Qur'ān.¹⁹

OBJECTION: 'But' the expressions that 'you' mentioned at the beginning of 'this' section, and those similar to them, are 'from' the speech of nations other than the Arabs; they were adopted by the Arabs and Arabized.

REPLY: What is your incontrovertible proof for the truth of what you say? . . . What is the difference between you and those who oppose you on this matter and say 'that' the origin of these expressions . . . is Arabic? . . .

§ Ṭabarī pursues this dialectic further to show that without a definite proof neither of the two sides can win the argument.

THE ARABIC DIALECT
IN WHICH THE QUR'ĀN WAS SENT DOWN

For those who have managed to understand it, we have given sufficient proof of the correctness of the opinion that God sent down the whole of the Qur'ān in the Arabic language, and not in any other of the languages of the nations 'of mankind', and of the incorrectness of the opinion of those who claim that some of it is not in Arabic or its dialects.

Now we say: If this is true, . . . in which of the dialects of the Arabs was 'the Qur'ān' sent down? In all of them, or in one of them? For although the Arabs are all called by the one name, they have different ways of expressing themselves, different manners of speaking. This being the case, and since God has informed His servants that He has made the Qur'ān Arabic, and that He has sent it down in a clear, Arabic tongue,²⁰ and since this ostensibly has both a particular sense¹, i.e., that it is a particular dialect¹ and a general sense¹ i.e., that all the dialects are meant¹, the only way for us to know whether God meant the particular or the general sense is through an explanation by the person to whom the proper explanation of the Qur'ān was accorded, and that is the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace.

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'The Qur'ān was sent down in seven *ḥarfs*.²¹ Disputation concerning the Qur'ān is unbelief'—he said this three times—and you should put into practice what you know of it, and leave what you do not know of it to someone who does.' [7]

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'An All-knowing, Wise, Forgiving, Merciful sent down the Qur'ān in seven *ḥarfs*.' [8 and 9]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd:

The Messenger of God said: 'The Qur'ān was sent down in seven *ḥarfs*. Each of these *ḥarfs* has an outward aspect (*ẓahr*) and an inward aspect (*batn*); each of the *ḥarfs* has a border, and each border has a lookout.'²² [10 and 11]

(..)

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd:

We disputed about a sura of the Qur'ān, . . . 'about whether' there

were thirty-five or thirty-six verses. (...) So we hurried to the Messenger of God, and we found 'Alī in intimate conversation with him. (...) We said: 'We differ in recitation.' The face of the Messenger of God reddened 'in anger' and he said: 'Those before you perished only because of their disagreements.' (...) Then he whispered something to 'Alī, who said to us: 'The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, commands you to recite as you were taught.' [13]

(..)

⇒ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb:

I heard Hishām b. Ḥakīm recite the sura of the Furqān (25) during the lifetime of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. I listened to his recitation, and 'noticed that' he was reciting according to many *ḥarfs* in which the Messenger of God had never had me recite. I was about to grab hold of him in 'the middle of his' prayer, but I waited till he had recited the final salutations. When he had finished, I seized him by his robe and said: 'Who taught you to recite the sura which I have just heard you recite?' He said: 'The Messenger of God taught me to recite it.' I said: 'You are lying. By God, the Messenger of God himself taught me to recite this sura which I have just heard you recite.'

So I hurriedly took him to the Messenger of God and said: 'O Messenger of God, I have heard this man recite the sura of the Furqān in *ḥarfs* in which you never taught me to recite it, and it was you yourself who taught me to recite the sura of the Furqān.' (...) The Messenger of God said: 'Let him go, 'Umar; and you, Hishām, recite.' So he recited for him the recitation I had heard him recite and the Messenger of God said: 'It was sent down like that.' Then the Messenger of God said: 'Now' you recite, 'Umar', and I recited it as the Messenger of God had taught me. Then the Messenger of God said: 'It was sent down like that.' Then the Messenger of God said: 'Indeed, this Qur'ān was sent down in seven *ḥarfs*. You should recite whichever comes easily to you.' [15]

(..)

⇒ 'Alqama al-Nakha'ī:

When 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd left Kūfa, his companions gathered round him. He took leave of them, and said: 'Do not dispute about the Qur'ān. It will not vary, nor will it dwindle or change

because it is often repeated. The revealed law (*sharī'a*) of Islam, its legal punishments (*ḥudūd*), its religious obligations (*farā'id*), exist in it in a single form. If something in one of the *ḥarfs* forbade something which another commanded, that would be a variation, but it combines all that; there are no variations in it regarding the legal punishments or the religious obligations, nor in anything else in the laws of Islam.

'I remember when we disputed about the Qur'ān before the Messenger of God; he ordered us to recite before him, and told each of us we had recited properly. If I were to come to know that someone knew more than I did about what God had sent down to His Messenger, I would seek him out in order to add his knowledge to mine. I learnt seventy suras from the tongue of the Messenger of God himself, and I knew that the Qur'ān was read to him 'by those Companions chosen to learn it by heart and recite it to him so that he could check the recitation' every month of Ramaḍan, until the year his life was taken away, when it was recited twice. When that was finished, I recited myself before him, and he told me I had recited properly. He who recites like I recite must not abandon 'that recitation for another', and he who recites according to another *ḥarf* must not abandon 'that for another', for he who rejects any verse rejects them all.'²³ [18]

(..)

⇒Ubaïy b. Ka'b:

I was in the mosque 'in Medina' when a man came in and prayed. He recited 'the suras in the prayer' according to a recitation which I disapproved of him using. Then another man entered; and he recited according to a recitation which was different from that of his fellow worshipper. So we all went in to see the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. I said: 'O Messenger of God, this man recited in a way which I disapprove of him using. Then this man came in and recited in a way different from that of his fellow worshipper.' So the Messenger of God commanded them to recite, and approved what each of them had done. There arose in my soul some doubt which I had not experienced since the Jāhiliyya,²⁴ and when the Messenger of God saw what had befallen me he struck me in the chest and I suddenly began to perspire as if I was contemplating God in great fear. Then he said to me: 'O Ubaïy! 'An angel' was sent 'to me to transmit

from God these words': "Recite the Qur'ān according to one *ḥarf*." I replied: "Make things easy for my Community." He came back to me a second time 'and said': "Recite the Qur'ān according to one *ḥarf*." I replied: "Make things easy for my Community." He came back to me a third time 'and said': "Recite it according to seven *ḥarfs*, and for each of the repetitions 'of My command' which I have made to you, you may ask something of Me." I said: "O my God, forgive my Community. O my God, forgive my Community." As for the third one, I deferred it until the Day when all creatures, even Abraham, will ask for my intercession." [30; see also 38 and 46. For similar narrations see ⇒Ubaïy b. Ka'b, 32 and 33; ⇒(Ubaïy b. Ka'b?), 39; ⇒Abū Juhaïm al-Anṣārī, 41]

'Ubaïy further said: 'The Messenger of God said to me: 'I ask God to protect you from doubt and denial.' He also said: 'God commanded me to recite the Qur'ān according to one *ḥarf*, and I said: "O God, my Lord, alleviate 'the difficulties' of my community." He said: "Recite it according to two *ḥarfs*." And He commanded me to recite it according to seven *ḥarfs*, from seven gates of the Garden, each of them being curative and sufficient.'²⁵ [31. For this last phrase, see also, *inter alios*, ⇒'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 17; ⇒'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, 42]

(..)

⇒Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'This Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*. So recite; there is no restriction 'on which one you recite'; but where mercy is mentioned do not finish up mentioning punishment, and where punishment is mentioned do not finish up mentioning mercy.' [45]

It is certain that the Qur'ān was sent down in some of the Arabic tongues and not all of them, for it is clear that there are more than seven tongues and dialects beyond count.

QUESTION: What is your proof that the meaning of the Prophet's words 'the Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*' and 'I was commanded to recite the Qur'ān according to seven *ḥarfs*' is as you claim, 'namely' that it was sent down in seven dialects, and that he was commanded to recite it in seven dialects, and that they do not mean

what those who oppose your opinion¹ say, 'namely¹ that it was sent down with command and prohibition (*amr wa-zajr*), encouragement of good and discouragement of evil (*targhīb wa-tarhīb*), narrative and parable (*qaṣaṣ wa-maṭhal*), and so forth? You know that those who said this were among the pious predecessors in the Community and from the elite of their leaders.

REPLY: Those who said this were not claiming that the interpretation of the Traditions which we have previously quoted was what you claim that they said about the seven, but not more, *ḥarfs* in which the Qur'ān was sent down; that 'indeed¹ would be contrary to what we said. They only stated that the Qur'ān had been sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*, meaning by this that it had been sent down according to seven 'aspects (*wajh*, pl. *wujūh*)'²⁶ We have already narrated some Traditions from the Prophet and from a number of the Companions which are similar to what these people¹ say, and we shall investigate the rest of them with their explanations when we come to them, God willing.

As for the Tradition of Ubaiy b. Ka'b¹, [31] above¹, in which it is mentioned that the Prophet said: 'I was commanded to recite the Qur'ān according to seven *ḥarfs*, from seven gates of the Garden', the seven *ḥarfs* correspond to the seven dialects we spoke about, and the seven gates of the Garden correspond to the seven meanings in it, command and prohibition, encouragement of good and discouragement of evil, narrative, and parable, which, if a person practices them and follows them through to their limits, will necessarily entitle him to Paradise. There is thus, praise be to God, no contradiction between what these predecessors of ours have said and anything we have said.

The proof of the correctness of what we have said 'about¹ the meaning of the 'se¹ authoritative narrations by 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, and Ubaiy b. Ka'b from the Prophet . . . is that they disputed among themselves about the Qur'ān, and that some of them differed with others about the recitation itself, not about the meanings, so they appealed to the Prophet to adjudicate between them about this. Then he asked them all to recite, and approved all of them in their recitations despite their differences, although some of them had doubts about his approval of them; and he said to those who had doubts . . . : 'God commanded me to recite the Qur'ān according to seven *ḥarfs*.' It is clear that if their dispute . . . had been about

Proof that the seven *ḥarfs* in these Traditions correspond to seven dialects

declarations of lawfulness and unlawfulness, or about the Promise and the Threat,²⁷ and so forth, which their recitations indicated, he could not have approved all of them and commanded each reciter . . . to follow his own reading concerning 'these things¹, for, if this were correct, it would necessarily follow that God commanded the obligatory performance of a certain act in whoever's recitation indicated it was obligatory, prohibited the performance of the same act in whoever's recitation indicated it was forbidden, and gave freedom over the performance of the same act, allowing those servants of His who wanted to do it to do it, and allowing those servants of His who wanted to refrain from it to refrain from it, in whoever's recitation indicated a free choice. In other words, if someone were to hold this opinion, he would be affirming what God has denied about His Revelation and the legal authority of His Book: «What, do they not ponder the Qur'ān? If it had been from other than God, surely they would have found in it much inconsistency.» (4: 82) In God's denial that the legal authority of His Book was like this is the clearest proof that He sent down His Book on the tongue of Muḥammad with only a single judgement applying equally to all His creatures, not with judgements which differed among them.

(...)

Moreover, there is textual evidence for the correctness of what we have said in a Tradition from the Messenger of God.

⇒Abū Bakra:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'Gabriel said: "Recite the Qur'ān according to one *ḥarf*." 'Then¹ Michael, peace be with him, said: "Request more 'than this for him¹." He said: "'Recite¹ according to two *ḥarfs*." 'This continued¹ until it reached six or seven *ḥarfs*. (...) Each one is curative and sufficient—as long as one does not finish up a verse of punishment with a verse of mercy, or a verse of mercy with one of punishment—as if one were to say "*halumma*" instead of "*ta'āla*" (both = "Come!").' [47. Identical with 40.]

The text of this Tradition makes it clear that the difference between the seven *ḥarfs* is a difference of words . . . which agree in meaning, not a difference in meanings entailing a difference of legal norms.

There are also authentic Traditions from a group of the pious predecessors and successors which serve as examples of what we have said about this.

(..)

⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd:

He who recites the Qur'ān according to one *ḥarf* must not change from it to another. [50]

It is quite clear that 'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd' did not mean by what he said: He who recites any command or prohibition in the Qur'ān must not change from it to the recitation of any threat or promise in it, and he who recites any threat or promise in it must not change from it to the recitation of any narration or parable in it. What he meant, may God have mercy on him, was: He who recites with his *ḥarf* must not change from it to another 'just' because he dislikes it—and his *ḥarf* is his recitation, just as the Arabs call someone's recitation his *ḥarf*...—, and he who recites with Ubaiy's or Zaid's *ḥarf*, or with the *ḥarf* of any of the Companions of the Messenger of God who recited with one of the seven *ḥarfs*, must not change from it to another because he dislikes it. For unbelief in part of 'the Qur'ān' is unbelief in all of it, and unbelief in one of these *ḥarfs* is unbelief in all of it, meaning by *ḥarf* the recitation of anyone who recited with one of the seven *ḥarfs* as we have described.

(..)

⇒ Laith:

Mujāhid used to recite the Qur'ān according to five *ḥarfs*. [52]

⇒ Sālim:

Sa'īd b. Jubair used to recite the Qur'ān according to two *ḥarfs*. [53]

⇒ Mughīra:

Yazīd b. al-Walīd used to recite the Qur'ān according to three *ḥarfs*. [54]

Could those who claimed that the interpretation of the Prophet's words 'The Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*' was that it was sent down according to the seven 'aspects' which we have mentioned—command and prohibition, promise and threat, dialectic, narrative, and parable—have been of the opinion that Mūjahid and Sa'īd b. Jubair only recited two or five 'aspects' of the Qur'ān, and not its other meanings? For if they did suppose this of them, they have supposed something 'which does' not 'accord' with the 'se authorities'

high¹ level 'of understanding' of the Qur'ān or their knowledge of the verses of the Furqān, for which they are well known.

(..)

QUESTION: If the interpretation of the words of the Prophet 'The Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*' is, according to you, as you have described, what evidence do you have for it? Produce for us an expression in the Book of God which is recited in seven dialects, and we will admit the truth of what you say. Otherwise, if you do not find such an expression, it will be clear from your failure to do so that the opinion of those who say that it is to be interpreted as having been sent down with seven meanings... is correct, and that what you say is wrong.

Or do you say about this that the seven *ḥarfs* are seven dialects in the Qur'ān, dispersed throughout it, from the living dialects of the tribes of the Arabs which have different dialects, as some of those who have not looked closely into this say. For if so, you are saying something whose falsehood is clear to every intelligent person... That is to say, the Traditions by which you proved the truth of your opinion about the interpretation of the Prophet's words... are Traditions which you narrated from 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd, and Ubaiy b. Ka'b, ... according to which they disputed about the reading of part of the Qur'ān and differed about its recitation, not its interpretation. If the seven *ḥarfs*... were, according to you, dispersed through the Qur'ān, ... the meanings of the Traditions would be invalid..., because no *ḥarf* like this would produce any disagreement between reciters. All the reciters would recite the *ḥarf* with a single recitation, according to what is in the codex,²⁸ and what was sent down.

The existence
of the dialectal
recitations

(...)

REPLY: 'Our' opinion about this is not... as you describe it. Rather the seven *ḥarfs* in which God sent down the Qur'ān are seven dialectal 'readings' for a single expression or a single word, with different verbalizations but the same meaning, like someone saying 'halumma', 'aqbil', 'ta'āla', 'ilaiya', 'qaṣḍī', 'naḥwī', 'qurbi' (all = 'Come!'),²⁹ and so forth....

OBJECTION: So in which verses of the Book of God do we find a single expression recited in seven dialects with different verbalizations but agreeing in meaning? Then we shall concede to you the correctness of what you claim about the interpretation of this.

REPLY: We do not claim that they are in existence at the present time; only it has been reported to us that the meaning of what the Prophet said is as the Traditions have explained, and this is what we have described. What we claim is not at variance with this, for the reason we have already explained.

OBJECTION: So what has happened to the six other *ḥarfs* no longer in existence, if the matter is as you say it is, and the Messenger of God taught and commanded his Companions to recite them, and God sent them down from Him to His prophet, Muḥammad? Were they abrogated and taken back? What is the proof of their having been abrogated and taken back? Or has the Community forgotten them? But this would imply that they had caused something to vanish which they had been commanded to preserve. What is the story concerning this?

REPLY: They were not abrogated, nor did they go back; the Community who were commanded to preserve 'the Revelation' did not cause it to vanish. The Community were commanded to preserve the Qur'ān, and they were allowed to choose to recite and preserve it in whichever of these seven *ḥarfs* they wanted, just as they were commanded to expiate for breaking an oath, if they are wealthy, by any of three expiations they like: by freeing 'a slave', by feeding 'the poor', or by clothing 'them'.³⁰ And if they agree on expiation by one of the three 'ways' of expiation 'alone', without banning expiation by whichever of the three 'ways' the expiator wishes, they will have carried out God's ruling and discharged their duty towards God concerning it. In the same way the Community were commanded to preserve the Qur'ān and its recitation, and they were left to choose to recite it in any of the seven *ḥarfs* they wished; and they decided—for the reason which obliged them to rely on 'only' one *ḥarf*—to recite it according to a single *ḥarf*, and they discarded recitation according to the six remaining *ḥarfs*, although they did not ban the reciter from reciting it according to all its permitted *ḥarfs*.

QUESTION: What was the reason which obliged them to rely on one *ḥarf* rather than any of the six remaining *ḥarfs*?

REPLY

⇒ Zaid b. Thābit:

At the time when 'many of' the Companions of the Messenger of

God were being killed in al-Yamāma,³¹ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb went to see Abū Bakr and said to him: 'The Companions of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, are flocking to al-Yamāma like moths plunging into a flame, and I fear that they will not see their homes again, but will fight and be killed. Now these men are the "bearers" of the Qur'ān 'i.e., those in whose memories it is preserved', so the Qur'ān will be lost and forgotten. What if you were to gather it together and write it down?'

Abū Bakr disliked 'this suggestion' and said: 'Should I do what the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, never did?' So they argued about this matter.—Abū Bakr then sent word to Zaid b. Thābit, and 'this is how Zaid narrated the sequel':—I went to see 'Abū Bakr', and 'Umar was sitting there very tense and alert. Abū Bakr said: 'This man has invited me to do something which I have refused to do. You', Zaid, are the "scribe" of the Revelation.³² If you agree with him, I will follow what both of you say; if you agree with me, I shall not do it.' (...) Abū Bakr recounted what 'Umar had said, while 'Umar kept silent.

I did not like 'what I heard', and said: 'Should we do what the Messenger of God, may the blessing and peace of God be upon him, never did?' Whereupon 'Umar said the words: 'What could be held against you two if you were to do this?' So we turned it over in our minds, and 'coming to the same conclusion' said: 'Nothing, by God! What could be held against us for doing this?' So Abū Bakr ordered me 'to gather the Book together and write it down'. I wrote it on page-size pieces of hide, small pieces of scapula and palm leaves.

When Abū Bakr died, and 'Umar became 'caliph', all this was written down 'again' on a single scroll and deposited with him. When he died, the scroll remained with 'his daughter, 'Hafṣa, the wife of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.

Then, when Ḥudhaifa b. al-Yamān returned from a military expedition to the Armenian steppes,³³ before he even entered his home, he went 'straight' to 'Uthmān b. 'Affān and said: 'O Commander of the Faithful, you must attend to the people!' 'Uthmān said: 'What is the matter?' 'I took a military expedition to the Armenian steppes,' he said, 'and people from Iraq and Syria took part. Since the Syrians recited 'in their prayers' according to the recitation of Ubaiy b. Ka'b³⁴ and uttered what the people of

Iraq had never heard before, the people of Iraq called them infidels. And since the people of Iraq recited according to the recitation of Ibn Mas'ūd and uttered what the Syrians had never heard before, the Syrians called them infidels.'

(...) 'Uthmān b. 'Affān ordered me to write out a 'definitive' scroll for him, saying: 'I will send in 'to work' with you an intelligent man whose Arabic is pure; when you are in agreement on something write it down. But if you disagree on something, refer it to me.' He assigned Abān b. Sa'īd b. al-'Āṣ to me. When we reached «The sign of his kingship is that the Ark (*al-tābūt*) will come to you» (2: 248), 'I said' *al-tābūh* and Abān b. Sa'īd said *al-tābūt*, so we referred it to 'Uthmān, who wrote *al-tābūt*. When I had finished, I reviewed the text, but I could not find this verse anywhere: «Among the believers are men who were true to their covenant with God; some of them have fulfilled their vow by death, and some are still awaiting, and they have not changed in the least» (33: 23). I sought out the Muhājirūn, and asked them about this, but I could find no trace of it with any of them. So I sought out the Anṣār, and asked them about it, but I could find no trace of it with any of them.³⁵ Finally, I found it with Khuzaima b. Thābit, and wrote it down.

Then I made another revision, and 'this time' failed to find these two verses: «Now there has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering; anxious is he over you, gentle to the believers, compassionate. * So if they turn their backs, say: 'Allāh is enough for me. There is no god but He. In Him have I put my trust. He is Lord of the Mighty Throne.'» (9: 128-9) So I sought out the Muhājirūn and asked them about this, but I could find no trace of it with any of them. So I sought out the Anṣār and asked them about it, but I could find no trace of it with any of them. Finally, I found it with another man called Khuzaima, and I set 'these verses' at the end of al-Barā'a (sura 9). If they had been three verses, I would have made them a sura on their own.³⁶

Then I made a 'third' revision, and found nothing 'missing'. Then 'Uthmān sent word to Ḥaṣṣa asking her to give him the scroll, making a promise to her that he would return it. She handed it over to him, and he compared the book 'we had compiled' with it. No difference was found between them. Then he returned it to her. He was pleased and ordered people to copy

several books 'from the master copy'. When Ḥaṣṣa died, a strict order was sent to 'her brother' 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar for the scroll, and he gave it to them and it was given a thorough washing.³⁷ [59, 60. Further Traditions about the recension of the Qur'ān: ⇒ Abū Qilāba, 61; ⇒ Anas b. Mālik al-Anṣārī, 62; ⇒ (Zaid b. Thābit?), 63; ⇒ Ṣa'ṣa'a, 64]

'There are' Traditions similar to this', but to study them all would 'unduly' lengthen the book. And 'there are' Traditions which show that the Leader of the Muslims, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān, may God have mercy on him, 'struggled to' unite the Muslims, being anxious over them, gentle and compassionate towards them, alert to any apostasy among them after 'their acceptance' of Islam, and to any unbelief creeping in among them after 'their newly-found' faith. For there appeared in his own time, and in his presence, some people who denied some of the seven *ḥarṣ*s in which the Qur'ān had been sent down, despite the fact that the Companions of the Messenger of God had heard him forbid the denial of anything from 'the *ḥarṣ*s' and inform them that doubt about them constituted unbelief.

When 'Uthmān saw this 'denial' manifesting itself among them in his own time, and because of the nearness of their time to the sending down of the Qur'ān and to the departure of the Messenger of God from among them, he instituted something for them that would protect them from a terrible affliction in the religion, and that was the recitation of the Qur'ān according to a single *ḥarṣ*. He united them over a single recension, a single *ḥarṣ*, and destroyed all other codices from which this one had been collected. He required everyone who had a variant codex to tear it up, and the Community obediently rallied to him on this matter. They saw that there was correct conduct and good guidance 'for them' in what he had done. So they abandoned the recitation according to the six *ḥarṣ*s which their just leader had required them to abandon, obeying him in this out of their own self-interest as well as out of interest for those other generations of their community who were to come after them. 'So complete was their obedience to him on this matter' that 'all' knowledge 'of these other *ḥarṣ*s' was effaced from the Community, and 'all' trace of them disappeared, so that today no one can find his way 'to discovering' how to recite them, for they have disintegrated or been obliterated. The Muslims have followed each other, generation by generation, in rejecting the

recitation of the 'other *ḥarfs*', without denying their validity or the validity of any part of them, having their own interests and those of their co-religionists in view. Today the Muslims have only this recitation according to the unique 'remaining' *ḥarf*, which their compassionate and sincere leader chose for them, and not the six other *ḥarfs* which he abandoned.

§ Ṭabarī justifies the dropping of the six other *ḥarfs* on the grounds that the Prophet did not give the Community a binding command to preserve them all, but only a recommendation to do so. On the other hand, it was binding on them to ensure that the best interests of Islam and its followers were preserved, and this is what they did by abandoning all but one *ḥarf*.

(...)

QUESTION: Do you know the seven dialects in which the Qur'ān was sent down? Which of the Arabic tongues are these?

REPLY: First, there is no need for us to know the six other *ḥarfs* in which the Qur'ān was sent down, since, if we knew them, we should not recite with them, for the reasons we have already given. It is said that five of them 'correspond to the dialects' of the hind 'or lower' clans of the 'tribe of' Hawāzin, and that two of them 'correspond to the dialects' of 'the tribes of' Quraish and Khuzā'a.³⁸ All this is narrated from Ibn 'Abbās, but the narrations from him are not narrations that can be adduced as proofs. That is to say, it was al-Kalbī through Abū Ṣāliḥ who narrated from him 'Five of them are from the dialect of the hind clans of Hawāzin', and Qatāda [65] who narrated from him 'The two others are a dialect of Quraish and Khuzā'a', but Qatāda never met him or heard from him.³⁹

(..)

As for the meaning of the words of the Prophet when he said that the Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*, and that each of them was curative and sufficient,⁴⁰ it is as God has said concerning the quality of the Qur'ān: «O men, now there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, and a remedy for what is in the breasts, and a guidance, and a mercy to the believers.» (10: 57) God has made 'the Qur'ān' a remedy for the believers, to seek in its exhortations the cure for the maladies which arise in their hearts from the whisperings and suggestions of Satan; and the eloquent discourse of its verses suffices them and allows them to do without all the 'other' counsels they have abandoned.

EXPLANATION OF THE MEANING

OF THE WORDS OF THE MESSENGER OF GOD:

'THE QUR'ĀN WAS SENT DOWN FROM SEVEN GATES OF PARADISE',
AND A QUOTATION OF THE TRADITIONS WHICH REPORT THEM

[T]: There is a difference in the form of words of the Tradition concerning this from the Messenger of God.

⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd:

The Messenger of God said: 'The first Book came down from one gate according to one *ḥarf*, but the Qur'ān came down from seven gates according to seven *ḥarfs*: prohibiting and commanding, lawful and unlawful, clear and ambiguous,⁴¹ and parables. So allow what it makes lawful, proscribe what it makes unlawful, do what it commands you to do, forbid what it prohibits, be warned by its parables, act on its clear 'passages', trust in its ambiguous 'passages'.' And they said: 'We believe in it; it is all from our Lord.' [67]

⇒ Abū Qilāba:

It has reached me that the Prophet said: 'The Qur'ān was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*: command and prohibition, encouragement of good and discouragement of evil, dialectic, narrative, and parable.' [68]⁴²

§ Ṭabarī also quotes [31] above.

⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd:

God sent down the Qur'ān according to five *ḥarfs*: lawful and unlawful, clear and ambiguous, and parables. So allow what it makes lawful, proscribe what it makes unlawful, act on the clear 'passages', trust in the ambiguous 'passages', and be warned by the parables. [70]

All these Traditions which we have quoted from the Messenger of God are close to each other in meaning, because it is the same whether someone says that so-and-so is standing at the gate of, or in front of ('*alā wajh*'), or at the edge of ('*alā ḥarf*'), something. Have you not seen that God described a group of people who worshipped Him according to one of the aspects (*wajh*) of worship, and stated that they worshipped Him according to a *ḥarf*, saying «And among men

The equivalence of '*ḥarf*', 'aspect', and 'gate' in these Traditions

there is he who worships God on the edge ('*alā ḥarf*') » (22: 11), meaning that they worshipped Him according to the aspect of doubt, not with certainty and submission to His command?⁴³

Similarly, there is harmony between the meanings of the narrations of those who narrated from the Prophet that he said that the Qur'ān was sent down from seven gates and that it was sent down according to seven *ḥarfs*, and there is no difference in the interpretation 'of the two passages' in this respect. The meaning of all of them is that 'the Prophet' told of the excellence and liberality of that which 'God' had conferred on him and his community in His Revelation, and which He had bestowed on no one 'else'.

That is to say, each scripture which preceded our Book was sent down to one of God's prophets, may God bless them and grant them peace, in only a single tongue, and when it was changed into a tongue other than that in which it was sent down, this was an interpretation (*tarjama*) and a commentary (*tafsīr*) of it, not a recitation according to what God had sent down. But our scripture was sent down in seven tongues, 'and' in whichever of these seven tongues a reciter recited it, it was a recitation of it according to what God had sent down, not an interpretation or a commentary, unless he changed it into a tongue other than these seven. Then, if its meaning were correct, the person who did this would be interpreting it, in the same way if someone were to recite one of the scriptures which God had sent down in a single tongue in a tongue other than that in which it had been sent down, he would be interpreting it, not reciting it as it was sent down. This is the meaning of the Prophet saying 'in [61] above' that the first scripture came down according to a single *ḥarf*, while the Qur'ān came down according to seven.

As for the meaning of his words 'The first Book came down from one gate according to one *ḥarf*, but the Qur'ān came down from seven gates according to seven *ḥarfs*',⁴⁴ by the first Book coming down from one gate he meant the Books of God which came down to His prophets to whom they were sent down, in which there were no divine ordinances and judgements, or 'pronouncements about' what was lawful and what was unlawful, such as the Psalms of David, which are invocations and exhortations, and the Evangel of Jesus, which is glorification, praise, and encouragement to pardon and be charitable, but no legal ordinances and judgements besides this, and scriptures like these which came down with one of the seven meanings, all of which are contained in our Book which God conferred on our prophet,

Muḥammad, and his community. There was no way in which those who devoted themselves to practising 'what these scriptures taught' could find God's approval and attain the Garden except through the single aspect with which their Book was sent down, and this was the single gate of the Garden from which that Book was sent down.

God singled out our prophet, Muḥammad, and his community by sending down His Book to them according to seven of the aspects by which, if they put them into practice, they will gain God's approval and reach success in the Garden. Each of the seven aspects is one of the gates of the Garden from which the Qur'ān came down, for he who acts according to each of the seven aspects acts at one of the gates of the Garden, and thereby seeks success in it. Acting according to what God commands in His Book is one of the gates of the Garden; abstaining from what God forbids in it is a second gate; taking as lawful what God makes lawful in it is a third gate; taking as unlawful what God makes unlawful in it is a fourth gate; faith in what is clear in it is a fifth gate; submitting to what is ambiguous in it—knowledge of which God has taken for Himself and has concealed from His creatures—and avowing that all this is from one's Lord is a sixth gate; and taking heed from its parables, and acceding to its admonitions, is a seventh gate. God has made everything in the Qur'ān—the seven *ḥarfs* and the seven gates from which it came down—a guide for His servants towards His pleasure, that which will lead them to the Garden. This is the meaning of 'the Prophet's words 'The Qur'ān came down from seven gates of the Garden.'

As for 'the Prophet's words concerning the Qur'ān, 'each of the *ḥarfs* has a border',⁴⁵ it means that each of the seven aspects has a border which God has marked off and which no one may overstep. And 'as for' his words 'Each of the *ḥarfs* has an outward aspect (*ẓahr*) and an inward aspect (*baṭn*)',⁴⁶ its outward aspect is the ostensive 'meaning of' the recitation, and its inward aspect is its interpretation, which is concealed. And 'by' his words 'and each border . . . has a lookout' he means that for each of the borders which God marked off in 'the Qur'ān'—of the lawful and the unlawful, and its other legal injunctions—there is a measure of God's reward and punishment which surveys it in the Hereafter, and inspects it . . . at the Resurrection. . . .

Comments on
a preceding
Tradition

CONCERNING THE ASPECTS THROUGH WHICH
KNOWLEDGE OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN
IS ATTAINED

(...)

God, exalted is His mention, and hallowed are His Names, said to His prophet, Muḥammad: «We have sent down to you the Remembrance (*al-dhikr*)⁴⁷ that you may make clear to mankind what was sent down to them; and so haply they will reflect» (16: 44). He also said: «And We have not sent down upon you the Book except that you may make clear to them that whereon they were at variance, and as a guidance and as a mercy to a people who believe» (16: 64); and: «It is He who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are verses clear (*muḥkamāt*) that are the Essence of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*), and others ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*). As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension and desiring its interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say: 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds» (3: 7).

«From this, three things¹ . . . become clear.

«First,¹ knowledge of the interpretation of some of the Qur'ān . . . can be attained only through the explanation given by the Messenger. This is the interpretation of whatever contains: 'various¹ modes of His command—that which is obligatory, that which is recommended, and that which is given for guidance;⁴⁸ 'different¹ kinds of His interdiction; duties 'of observing and implementing¹ His rights and prescribed punishments (*ḥuqūq wa-ḥudūd*);⁴⁹ amounts of sums He has

Interpretation
through the
explanations
of the Prophet

fixed in inheritance; the extent of legal obligations between His creatures; and similar legal rulings 'which come¹ in the verses, and about which no knowledge can be grasped except through the explanation given by the Messenger of God to his community. This is an aspect concerning which no one may give an opinion except by means of the explanation of its interpretation 'given by¹ the Messenger of God, either through a text (*naṣṣ*) to do with it from him, or through an indication (*dalāla*) which he has given, pointing his community to its 'correct¹ interpretation.

«Secondly,¹ the interpretation of 'some other aspects¹ is known only to God, the One, the Omnipotent. This is whatever contains information about future dates and times, such as the time when the

Hour of the Resurrection will begin, when the last trump will be sounded, when Jesus, the son of Mary, will come down, and so on. No one knows the fixed dates for these events, nor does anyone know how to interpret them except through the information 'God gives¹ of their portents. For God alone, and none of His creatures, possesses knowledge of them. Concerning this our Lord sent down a clear part of His Book, saying: «They will question you concerning the Hour, when it shall berth. Say: 'The knowledge of it is only with my Lord; none shall reveal it at its proper time, but He. Heavy is it in the heavens and the earth; it will not come on you but suddenly!' They will question you, as though you are well informed of it. Say: 'The knowledge of it is only with God, but most men know not.'» (7: 187) And when our Prophet mentioned anything to do with this subject, he would only indicate it by its portents without defining its time, as has been reported, *inter alia*, of him when he spoke about the Dajjāl⁵⁰ to his Companions:

Interpretation
known only
to God

If he emerges while I am still among you, then I am the one who will bring proof against him; but if he emerges after 'I have gone¹, then God will take my place over you.

This shows that he had no knowledge of the times of any of these things in terms of years and days, and that God, exalted is His praise, only informed him of their advent together with their portents, and only announced their time by pointing indirectly towards them.

«Thirdly,¹ everyone who knows the language in which the Qur'ān was sent down knows the interpretation of 'some of its aspects¹. They can establish its desinential inflexions (*i'rāb*),⁵¹ they know the things referred to by essential and unambiguous names in it, and the things qualified by specific attributes; none of them is ignorant of these things. An example is someone who hears the recitation of: «When it is said to them: 'Do not work corruption in the land', they say: 'We are only ones that put things right.' Truly they are the workers of corruption, but they are not aware» (2: 11 and 12); he knows that the meaning of 'working corruption' is 'doing¹ that which is harmful which must be refrained from', and that the meaning of 'putting things right' is 'doing¹ those beneficial things which must be done', even if he remains ignorant of which particular things God has fixed as corruptions, and which He has fixed as right 'actions¹ 'Such a person, however, does not know¹ which rulings in it are obligatory, or their attributes

Interpretation
by experts in
the Arabic
language

and the conditions for them, 'all of' which God has given knowledge of only to His Prophet, and which can only be understood through his explanation; nor 'does he know' what only God, and none of His creatures, knows.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

There are four aspects to exegesis: an aspect which the Arabs know through their language, an exegesis which no one may be excused from not knowing, an exegesis which the learned know, and an exegesis known only to God, exalted is His mention. [71]

The meaning of this fourth aspect which Ibn 'Abbās mentioned, which no one can be excused from not knowing, is different from explanation on the basis of the aspects of the topics of 'the Qur'ān's' interpretation; it is merely a statement that there is part of its interpretation which no one can be excused from not knowing. In another report, about whose chain of transmitters there are some reservations, the Messenger said . . . :

The Qur'ān was revealed according to four aspects (*ḥarf*): the licit and the illicit, which no one may be excused from not knowing; the exegesis which the Arabs can expound; the exegesis which the learned can expound; and the ambiguous 'aspect' known only to God, exalted is His mention. Whoever claims knowledge of 'this last aspect', apart from God, is a liar. [72]⁵²

A QUOTATION OF SOME TRADITIONS
WHICH HAVE BEEN NARRATED CONCERNING THE INTERDICTION
ON INTERPRETING THE QUR'ĀN
BY MEANS OF PERSONAL OPINION (RA'Y)⁵³

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Prophet said: 'Whoever speaks concerning the Qur'ān according to his personal opinion'—'or, in another report [75]: 'without knowledge'—'let him take his seat in the Fire.' [73]

(..)

⇒ Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq:

What earth shall bear me, what heaven shelter me, if I speak what I know not—'or, in another report [79]: according to my personal opinion—concerning the Qur'ān! [78]

These reports bear witness to what we have said, that it is not permitted for anyone to interpret according to his own personal opinion those verses of the Qur'ān whose interpretation can only be known through a text 'reporting' the explanation of God's Messenger, or through an indication towards it which he has given. Moreover, whoever propounds his personal opinion on this will be at fault in what he does, even if he thereby attains the truth, for the very reason of having spoken in this way. For his conclusion will not be that of someone who is sure that he is right, only that of someone who guesses and follows his own surmise; and whoever speaks about God's religion according to his own surmise speaks concerning God what he does not know. God, exalted is His praise, forbade His servants to do this when He said in His Book: «Say: 'My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the inward and the outward, and sin, and unjust insolence, and that you associate with God that for which He sent down never authority, and that concerning God such as you know not.'» (7: 33) . . .

⇒ Jundub:

The Messenger of God said: 'Whoever speaks according to his own personal opinion concerning the Qur'ān, and is right, is 'nevertheless' at fault.' [80]

He means that he is at fault in what he does when he gives his own personal opinion about 'the Qur'ān', even if what he says is in exact agreement with what is correct before God, for . . . he does not speak as a person who knows that what he says about it is true and correct. He speaks falsely about God what he does not know, committing thereby a sin which he was commanded not to.

A QUOTATION OF TRADITIONS NARRATED
TO INCITE 'PEOPLE TO STRIVE' FOR KNOWLEDGE
OF EXEGESIS OF THE QUR'ĀN, AND ABOUT
THOSE COMPANIONS WHO USED TO GIVE EXEGESIS OF IT

⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd:

When one of us had learnt ten verses, he would not go further until he had come to know their meaning and how to act according to them. [81]

⇒ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'al-Sulamī:

Those who used to teach us to recite 'the Qur'ān' told us that they

would ask the Prophet to recite, and when they had learnt ten verses they would not go further until they had practised what actions 'were prescribed' in them. So we learnt the Qur'ān and its practice together. [82]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd:

By Him besides Whom there is no god! No verse of the Book of God was sent down without my knowing where and about what it had been sent down. And if I knew of a place where there was someone who knew more about the Book of God than I did, and which riding animals could reach, I would go to him. [83]

(..)

⇒ Shaqīq:

'Alī appointed Ibn 'Abbās to lead the *hajj*. (...) He addressed the people 'in such an excellent way' that if the Turks and the Byzantines had heard it they would have embraced Islam. Then he recited the sura of Light (24) to them, and commented on it. [85]

(..)

⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubayr:

Someone who recites the Qur'ān and does not then comment on it is like a blind person or a bedouin. [87]

(..)

God urged His servants to reflect upon the exhortations and clear proofs in the verses of the Qur'ān when He said to His Prophet: «A Book We have sent down to you, blessed, that men possessed of minds may ponder its signs and so remember» (38: 29), and when He said: «Indeed We have struck for the people in this Qur'ān every manner of similitude; haply they will remember; an Arabic Qur'ān, wherein there is no crookedness; haply they will be God-fearing» (39: 27 and 28), and in other verses like these . . . which show that they must acquire knowledge of the interpretation of those verses whose interpretation is not concealed from them.

This is because it is absurd to say to someone who does not understand what is said to him and cannot interpret it 'Be warned by what you cannot understand and by words, explanations, and speech you cannot comprehend', unless it means that he must 'first learn' to understand it, and then ponder on it and take warning from it. . . . It is

the same with the admonitions, wisdom, examples, and exhortations in the verses of the Book of God, one cannot say: 'Be warned by them', except to someone who knows the meanings of the expressions therein, someone who knows the language of the Arabs. Unless, of course, this signifies a command to the ignorant to learn the meanings of the Arabic language and then ponder on 'the Book' afterwards and be warned by its wisdom and different sorts of admonition.

Since this is the case, and since God . . . exhorted His servants to heed His warnings, it is clear that He did not command those who are ignorant of what His verses indicate. And since He could not command them to do this unless they know what He pointed out to them, it must be the case that they know the interpretation of those verses whose understanding is not concealed from them and is not known only to God. . . . Since this is true, then the opinion of those who reject the work of exegetes of those parts of the Book of God and its revelation whose interpretation is not concealed from His creatures is quite wrong.

A QUOTATION OF REPORTS WHICH HAVE BEEN
MISTAKENLY INTERPRETED BY THOSE WHO REJECT
THE VALIDITY OF INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN

OBJECTION: What do you have to say about 'the following Traditions'?

⇒ 'Ā'isha:

The Prophet would never comment on anything from the Qur'ān except verses with a number, which Gabriel taught him. [90, 91]

⇒ 'Ubaid Allāh b. 'Umar:

I became acquainted with the learned men of Medina, and they had no respect for talk about exegesis. Among them were Sālim b. 'Abd Allāh, al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyab, and Nāfi'. [92. See also ⇒ Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyab, 93-5; ⇒ 'Abīda al-Salamānī, 96-7; and a Tradition ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 98]

(..)

⇒ Yazīd b. Abī Yazīd:

We used to ask Sa'īd b. Musaiyab about what was licit and what was illicit, since he was the most knowledgeable person, but if we

asked him about the commentary of a verse of the Qur'ān he would say nothing, as if he had not heard. [100]

⇒'Amr b. Murra:

A man asked Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyab about a verse of the Qur'ān, and he said: 'Do not ask me about the Qur'ān! Ask someone who claims that none of it is concealed from him.' He meant 'Ikrima. [101]

(...)

REPLY: Traditions narrated from the Messenger of God 'to the effect' that the only thing he interpreted from the Qur'ān were the verses with a number corroborate what we said in the previous section, to wit, that knowledge of certain parts of the interpretation of the Qur'ān can only be had through the explanation of the Messenger of God. . . . And he could not have come to know 'their interpretation' unless God had taught him by inspiring (*waḥy*) it in him, either through Gabriel or whichever of His envoys He had wished 'to use'. These were the verses of which the Messenger of God would give a commentary to his Companions according to Gabriel's teaching, and these, no doubt, were verses with a number.

There are, as we have said, some verses of the Qur'ān . . . whose interpretation He did not make known 'even' to a near angel (*malak muqarrab*) or a prophet with a Message (*nabī mursal*).⁵⁴ . . . But 'those verses' whose interpretation His servants must know have been made clear to them by the Prophet according to God's explanation to him by inspiration through Gabriel. This is the meaning which He commanded him to explain to them when He said to him: «We have sent down to you the Remembrance (*al-dhikr*) that you may make clear to mankind what was sent down to them; and so haply they will reflect» (16: 44).

(...)

As for those Traditions we have quoted from the Followers we have quoted them from concerning their refraining from interpretation, the action of those of them who did this was similar to the action of those of them who refrained from giving legal opinions concerning events and occurrences because they believed that God did not cause His prophet to die until after He had perfected His religion for His servants, and because they knew that God had a judgement—in a text or through an indication—for every event or occurrence. They refrained

from giving these opinions not because they denied that God's judgement for 'these events' existed among them, but because they feared that by their own effort (*ijtihād*) they could not carry out the charge with which God had entrusted the learned among His servants. It was the same with the learned among the pious predecessors who refrained from speaking about the interpretation and exegesis of the Qur'ān; their refraining was out of caution lest they should fail to accomplish the objective of speaking correctly about it with which they were charged, not because the interpretation of 'these verses' was veiled from the men of knowledge in the community and did not exist among them.

A QUOTATION OF TRADITIONS
FROM SOME OF THE PIOUS PREDECESSORS (*AL-SALAF*)
CONCERNING THE FIRST EXEGETES
WHOSE KNOWLEDGE OF EXEGESIS WAS PRAISED,
AND THOSE WHOSE KNOWLEDGE OF IT WAS CENSURED

⇒'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd:

What an excellent interpreter (*tarjumān*) of the Qur'ān is Ibn 'Abbās! [104, 105, 106]

⇒Mujāhid:

I went through the text of the Qur'ān before Ibn 'Abbās three times, from the beginning to the end. I stopped at each verse in it and asked him about it. [108. See also 107.]

⇒Sufyān al-Thaurī:⁵⁵

If the interpretation comes to you from Mujāhid, it will be sufficient for you. [109]

⇒'Abd al-Malik b. Maisara:

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk never met Ibn 'Abbās, but he met Sa'īd b. Jubayr in Raiy, and learnt exegesis from him. [110]

(...)

⇒Zakariyā':

Al-Sha'bī⁵⁶ used to pass Abū Šāliḥ Bādhān, and he would take him by his ear, twist it, and say: 'You comment on the Qur'ān, yet you cannot even recite it!' [112]

(..)

⇒Šālih b. Muslim:

Al-Sha'bī passed al-Suddī when he was commentating, and said: 'It would be better for you that a drum be banged on your backside than 'that you' hold this session!' [114; also ⇒Muslim b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nakha'ī, 115]

(..)

We have spoken earlier in our book about the aspects of the interpretation of the Qur'ān: that the whole of it can be interpreted according to three aspects. There is no way of reaching one of them, which is 'the interpretation' known only to God and hidden from all His creatures. . . . The second is 'the interpretation' knowledge of which God vouchsafed specifically to His Prophet and to no one else in his community. . . . And the third is 'the interpretation' known to the people who speak the language in which the Qur'ān was sent down. . . .

This being the case, then the commentator most successful in reaching the truth, in the interpretation of 'that aspect' of the Qur'ān which there is a way for all servants to know, is⁷, firstly,⁷ the one with the clearest proof for 'all' that he interprets and commentates, the one whose interpretation goes back to the Messenger of God alone to the exclusion of the rest of his community, through Traditions reliably attributable to him, either through an extensive transmission,⁵⁷ . . . or otherwise through a transmission by righteous, reliable persons, . . . or because of an indication establishing their truth; and⁷, secondly,⁷ the one with the most correct demonstration for 'all' that he interprets and explains, knowledge of which which he can attain from the language. . . . Finally, his interpretation and commentary should not depart from what the pious predecessors among the Companions and the leaders, and the successors among the Followers, and the men of knowledge in the Community, have said.

A DISCUSSION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NAMES OF THE QUR'ĀN, THE SURAS, AND THE VERSES

God, exalted is His mention, gave four names to the Revelation which He sent down to His servant Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace.

THE QUR'ĀN—THE RECITATION: «We will relate to you the fairest of narrations, in that We have revealed to you this Qur'ān, while before that you were surely one of the heedless» (12: 3); «Surely this Qur'ān relates to the Children of Israel most of that concerning which they are at variance» (27: 76).⁵⁸

THE FURQĀN—THE DISCRIMINATION: «Blessed be He who has sent down the Furqān upon His servant, that he may be a warner to the worlds» (25: 1).

THE KITĀB—THE BOOK/THE SCRIPTURE: «Praise belongs to God who has sent down upon His servant the Kitāb and has not assigned unto it any crookedness» (18: 1).

THE DHIKR—THE REMEMBRANCE: «It is We who have sent down the Dhikr, and We watch over it» (15: 9).

[L/T] THE QUR'ĀN: FIRST OPINION: According to the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, the interpretation of 'Qur'ān' must 'be based on the correspondence between': 'qur'ān = 'qirā'a = tilāwa (=reading aloud, recitation)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«So, when We recite (qara'nā) it»—'When' We make it clear—«follow its recitation (qur'ān)» (75: 18)—act upon it. [117]

By this he meant: When We make it clear to you by recitation, act upon what We have made clear to you by recitation. Our opinion about the interpretation of the Tradition from Ibn 'Abbās is confirmed by this:

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«Ours it is to gather it, and to recite (qur'ān) it.»—We recite to you, so do not forget.—«So, when We recite it»—to you—«follow its recitation» (75: 17 and 18)—When it is read out to you, follow what is in it. [118]

(...)

SECOND OPINION: According to Qatāda's opinion, 'Qur'ān' must be from: qara'a (=to bring something together, to join one part of it with another)†

⇒Qatāda:

75: 17 means: Ours it is¹ to preserve it and compile (*ta'liḥ*) it. 75: 18 means:¹ Follow what it makes lawful and avoid what it makes unlawful. [119, 120]

So Qatāda believed that 'Qur'ān' should be interpreted as 'compilation (*ta'liḥ*)'.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: Both these opinions which we have related, Ibn 'Abbās's and Qatāda's, have an aspect of truth from the point of view of the Arabic language, although the best of the two opinions concerning the interpretation of the words of God 75: 17 and 18 is that of Ibn 'Abbās. For God commanded His Prophet in other verses of His Revelation to obey what was revealed to him, without ever authorizing him not to do anything which He had commanded him until such time as He had compiled the 'whole of the¹ Qur'ān for him, and 75: 18 is like the other verses of the Qur'ān in which God commanded him to obey what He had inspired in him in His Revelation.

If the meaning of His words «So, when We recite it, follow its recitation» was necessarily 'to be understood as¹ 'So, when We have compiled it, follow what We have compiled in it for you', it would necessarily follow that 'the Prophet¹ was not obliged to «Recite: In the name of your Lord who created» (96: 1) and to «... arise and warn» (76: 2) before the rest of the Qur'ān had been gathered together with 'these injunctions¹. That is to say, if someone believed this, it would be foreign to the opinion of the religious community (*ahl al-milla*). And since the correct opinion is that the Prophet was obliged to follow and act on the ruling of every verse in the Qur'ān whether it had been gathered together with the rest of them or not, what Ibn 'Abbās said is the correct opinion...‡

OBJECTION: How can it be called a *qur'ān*, meaning a 'recitation', when it is in fact the thing recited?

REPLY: 'This is permissible on account of a linguistic rule allowing the use of the verbal noun in place of the passive noun,¹ just as 'writing (*kitāb*)' can be used for something written (*maktūb*).‡⁵⁹

[L/T] **THE FURQĀN:** As for the interpretation of the name 'Furqān', although the expressions used by the experts in its exegesis differ, their meanings harmonize.

⇒Jābir 'b. Ziyād¹:

'Ikrima used to say: 'It is the same as "salvation (*najāt*)"'. [121; also ⇒Al-Suddī, 122.]

§ Ṭabarī says that this was the opinion of several early authorities.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

'It means¹ a 'way out (*makhraj*)'. [123; also ⇒Mujāhid, 124]

⇒Mujāhid:

«The day of the *furqān*» (8: 41): The day when God separates (*faraqa*) truth from falsehood. [125]

All these interpretations... with their different wordings, harmonize in meaning. That is to say, whoever is given a way out from something he is caught up in, is given the way out as a salvation. Similarly, when he is saved from it, he is given a victory over whoever seeks 'to do¹ evil to him in that situation, and a separation is effected between him and the one desiring evil for him....

Our opinion about the origin of *furqān* is that it is a separation between two things, a disjunction between them. This can be 'effected¹ by a judgement, a deliverance, the manifestation of a proof, or a victory, as well as by any other means. This clearly shows that the Qur'ān is called the 'Furqān' because it separates the one who is right from the one who is wrong by its proofs, its evidence, its delimitation of religious obligations, and by its other meanings which judge between who is right and who is wrong....

THE KITĀB: As for the interpretation of its name 'Kitāb', it is the verbal noun 'meaning 'writing'¹ from 'the 1st form verb¹ *kataba*... It 'means¹ the trace left by the writer of the letters of the alphabet... And it is called the Kitāb (= writing) although it is in fact the *maktūb* (= what is written) 'for the reason already given¹‡.

[L] **THE DHIKR:** As for the interpretation of its name 'Dhikr', there are two possible meanings. One is that it is a reminder from God by which He reminds His servants, and in which He informs them of His restrictions and impositions, as well as the other judgements He lays down. The other 'meaning¹ is that it is a citation, an ennoblement, and an honour, for whoever has faith in it and believes what is in it, as He has said: «Surely it is a *dhikr* for you and for your people» (43: 44), meaning by this that it is an ennoblement for him and his people.

* * *

Now the suras of the Qur'ān have names by which the Messenger of God called them.

⇒ Wāthila b. al-Asqa':

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'I was given the "seven long" 'suras' in place of the Torah, and I was given the "hundreds (*al-mi'ūn*)" in place of the Psalms, and I was given the "duplicated (*al-mathānī*)" in place of the Gospels, and I was preferred 'by being given' the "sectioned (*al-mufaṣṣal*)".' [126; see also ⇒ Wāthila b. al-Asqa', 129]

§ Other versions of this Tradition are given [⇒ Abū Qilāba, 127; ⇒ Musaiyab, 128], in which the significations of 'the hundreds' and 'the duplicated' are interchanged.

THE 'SEVEN LONG' 'SURAS': According to Sa'īd b. Jubair [130; see also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 131], these are: the Cow (2), the House of 'Imrān (3), Women (4), the Table (5), Cattle (6), the Battlements (7), and Jonah (10). . . . These suras are called the 'seven long' 'suras' because they are longer than the other suras of the Qur'ān.

THE 'HUNDREDS (*AL-MI'ŪN*)': These are the suras of the Qur'ān whose verses number one hundred, more or less.

[T] THE 'DUPLICATED (*AL-MATHĀNĪ*)': They are the ones which duplicate the 'hundreds' and follow them. . . . According to Ibn 'Abbās [132], they were so called because God repeated the similitudes, statements, and warnings in them. And Sa'īd b. Jubair is reported to have said [133] that they were so called because the divine precepts and punishments were duplicated in them. A very numerous group said that the whole Qur'ān is duplicated, while another group believed that 'the duplicated' signified the Fātiḥa (1) because its recitation is said twice in every prescribed prayer. We shall mention the names of those who held this opinion together with their reasons, and give the correct opinion concerning what they differed about in this, when, God willing, we reach the interpretation of «We have given you seven of *al-mathānī*» (15: 87).‡

THE 'SECTIONED (*AL-MUFAṢṢAL*)': It 'is the final part of the Qur'ān, and' is so called because of the many suras into which it is sectioned by the *basmala*.

[L] SURA: . . . 'It can be read in two ways. One way is' *sūra*, 'signifying' 'one of the degrees of height', hence the *sūr* of a town, meaning the wall which encircles it, because of its elevation over what it surrounds. . . .‡

(...)

Some read the word *su'ra*, and the interpretation of this, in the dialect of those who so read it, is: The part which is left in the Qur'ān over the rest of it, and which is retained. That is, the *su'r* of everything is what remains of it, left behind, after something has been taken away from it. . . .‡

* * *

[L] THE *ĀYAS*: As for 'the word' *āya* (= verse, lit., sign), it has two possible meanings. First, it is called *āya* because it is a sign by which the completion of what is before it and its beginning may be known, just like the sign which indicates the thing it points to . . . ‡, as in His words: «O our Lord, send down upon us a table out of the heavens, that shall be for us a festival, the first and the last of us, and a sign from You» (5: 114). Alternatively, 'it means' a 'narrative' (*qiṣṣa*).‡ . . .

A DISCUSSION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NAMES OF THE *FĀTIḤA* (= THE OPENING) OF THE BOOK

There is a sound report from the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, to the effect that:

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'It is *umm al-qur'ān*, *fātiḥat al-kitāb* (= the 'Opening of the Book'), and *al-sab' al-mathānī*.' [134]

These are the names of the Opening of the Book.

FĀTIḤAT AL-KITĀB: It has been given the name *fātiḥat al-kitāb* because copies of the Qur'ān open with its text, and the prescribed prayers are recited with it, and in both writing and reciting it opens suras of the Qur'ān which are recited.

UMM AL-KITĀB: It is called *umm al-kitāb* because it precedes the other suras of the Qur'ān, and they come after it, both in recitation and in writing. In this sense '*umm al-kitāb*' is similar to *fātiḥat al-kitāb*. It is

called *umm al-kitāb* because the Arabs call *umm* anything which gathers something together, anything which stands out in front, when it has subordinates behind it for which it is a leader (*imām*, from the same root as *umm*) gathering them together. Thus the cerebral membrane is called *umm al-ra's* (*ra's*=head), and a military standard or banner beneath which the troops assemble is called an *umm*. . . . Similarly, Mecca is called *umm al-qurā* (=mother of towns), because it stands out above all the towns, and is a focus for them all. It is also said to be called that because the earth spread out from there, and it became the *umm* for the whole earth.†

[R] *AL-SAB' AL-MATHĀNĪ*: As for its name *al-sab'* (=seven), it is because there are seven verses, about which there is no disagreement among all the reciters and scholars. They differ, however, as to which verses make up the seven. The great majority of the Kūfāns say 'that' the seven verses begin with the *basmala* 'and that the seventh verse begins: «the path of those . . .»', and this has been reported by one group of Companions of the Messenger of God and Followers. Others say 'that' it is seven verses among which the *basmala* is not counted, and the seventh 'begins: «not of those . . .»'. . . . This is the opinion of the great majority of the Medinese reciters and experts.

And as for the Prophet describing its seven verses as *mathānī*, it is because they are repeated in every voluntary and prescribed prayer, which is how al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī interpreted it.

⇒Abū Rajā':

I asked al-Ḥasan about His words: «We have given you seven of *al-mathānī*, and the mighty Qur'ān» (15: 87). He said: 'This is the Opening of the Book.' Then he was asked about it while I was listening, and he recited it, beginning: «Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being», until he reached the end of it. Then he said: 'It is repeated in every recitation'—or 'in every prayer'—Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī was not sure. [135]

(...)†

A DISCUSSION OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *ISTI'ĀDHA* FORMULA⁶⁰

The *isti'ādha* is the appeal for protection: *a'ūdhu bi-'llāhi mina 'l-shaiṭānī 'l-rajīm* (=I seek refuge with God from Satan, the stoned).

¶ I seek protection from God, and no one else among His creatures, from Satan, lest he harm me in my religion or turn me away from a right which is incumbent on me to my Lord.

AL-SHAIṬĀN: *Shaiṭān*⁶¹ in the speech of the Arabs is every rebel among the jinn, mankind, beasts, and everything. Thus has our Lord said: «So We have appointed to every Prophet an enemy—satans of men and jinn» (6: 112).

(. .)

The rebel among every kind of thing is called a *shaiṭān*, because its behaviour and actions differ from those of the rest of its kind, and it is far from the good. It is said that the word is derived from 'the use of the 1st form verb *shaṭana* in' the expression *shaṭanat dār-ī min dāri-k* (=My home is far from yours).†

RAJĪM: Someone who is *rajīm* (=stoned) . . . is cursed and reviled. Everyone who is reviled by evil words or insults has, as it were, stones flung at him. The origin of *rajm* is 'flinging', either verbally or physically. An example of verbal stoning is given 'in' what Abraham's father said to him: «Surely if you do not give over, I shall stone you (*arjumanna-ka*)» (19: 46). It is also possible that Satan is called the 'stoned' because God banished him from His heaven and stoned him with piercing shooting stars.⁶²

⇒'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās:

When first Gabriel was sent down to Muḥammad, he said: 'O Muḥammad, seek protection; say: "I seek protection from Satan, the stoned, in the All-hearing, the All-knowing."' Then he said: 'Say: "In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate."' Then he said: «Recite: In the name of your Lord who created» (96: 1). (...) This was the first sura which God sent down to Muḥammad. [137]

And 'Gabriel' commanded him to seek protection with God and not with His creatures.

¹ The text of Ṭabarī's Commentary would have been written down by one of his students from his dictation and subsequently read back to him so that he could certify its accuracy. Many Islamic texts were, and still are, compiled in this way, especially where the transmission of Traditions is concerned.

² See 6: 101 and 102.

³ *Rasūl*, pl. *rusul*, men whom God has sent with a divine Message (*risāla*). See also n. 54 below.

⁴ The 'divine speech' and the 'intimate communication' refer to Moses (see 4: 164). The help of the Holy Spirit refers to Jesus (see 2: 87 and 253, and 5: 110); so also do the raising of the dead and the curing of the infirm and the blind (see 3: 49, and 5: 110).

⁵ The Arabic word *dīn* is usually, and conveniently, translated as 'religion', but it should be borne in mind that it does not exactly correspond to this term. Whereas the etymology of 'religion' goes back to the Latin *religare* the idea of something 'binding' man to God, *dīn* denotes the obligations which God has imposed on mankind, for it is derived by Arabic philologists from the root *d-y-n*, from which the verb *dāna* (=to submit) and the noun *dāin* (=debt, obligation) are also derived. See *Exeg.* 1: 3, p. 67-8.

⁶ See 15: 9.

⁷ See 2: 23, 10: 38, 11: 13, and, above all, 17: 88.

⁸ See 3: 112.

⁹ See 3: 7.

¹⁰ Ṭabarī here concisely states the principles on which his Commentary is based. 'Schools of thought' is possibly too strong a translation of *madhhab*, for, in most places, Ṭabarī is merely giving differences of opinion between Companions, Followers, and those who transmitted from them. In the following paragraph, Ṭabarī states the priority of linguistic considerations in his Commentary. For more on his method, see *Intro.*, pp. 32-4, and *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xii-xiv and xix-xxi.

¹¹ *Bayān* is a term in Arabic rhetoric which originally approximated to the term *balāgha* (=eloquence). It denotes lucidity, and the means, or faculty, by which clarity of expression is achieved. It was explained as being 'the interpreter of knowledge' or 'of the heart', the idea to be expressed being first of all concealed, and it being *bayān* which threw light on it and made it acceptable to the mind, dispelling ambiguity and making reflection on the idea unnecessary. As such it was an ideal which the rhetorician strove to reach in his art. It later became a technical term in the science of rhetoric ('*ilm al-balāgha*) for that part of it which concerned itself with the study of comparison, metaphor, and metonymy.

¹² The soothsayer (*kāhin*, see 52: 29 and 69: 42) was a kind of spirit medium in pre-Islamic times, who was consulted on matters concerning the future as well as for the resolution of problems concerning the past. His oracular pronouncements were often expressed in rhythmic, rhymed, or assonant, prose (*ṣaf*), which is distinct from poetry and ordinary prose. It later became a literary style, of which the opening paragraphs of Ṭabarī's Introduction are an example.

¹³ For these and other names of the Qur'ān, see *Intro.*, pp. 40-43.

¹⁴ This is a reference to Musailama, a 'prophet' who arose among the Banū Ḥanīfa in al-Yamāma, in eastern Arabia, during Muḥammad's lifetime. He may have met Muḥammad shortly before the latter's death. It seems that Musailama preached in the name of al-Raḥmān, and even called himself by this name, and his 'prophetic' utterances were expressed in the rhymed prose of the soothsayers (see above, n. 12). After Muḥammad died, he laid claim to being his successor, and was supported by all the Banū Ḥanīfa. Abū Bakr eventually dispatched Khālīd b. al-Walīd at the head of an army to meet them, and, at 'Aqrabā' in al-Yamāma in 12/633, Musailama was defeated in a battle in the course of which many Muslims lost their lives, among them, according to the Tradition from Zaid b. Thābit quoted by Ṭabarī (see *Intro.*, pp. 24-7), many who had memorized the Qur'ān.

¹⁵ At this point in the text, where Ṭabarī quotes his first Traditions, he inserts the remark: 'wherever in this book we say "he has reported to us", it really has been reported to us', in order to make clear that the Traditions he cites have been passed on to him following the correct method, and that he himself is the first link in the chain of transmission (*isnād*). See *Trans. Intro.*, pp. ix-x.

¹⁶ For biographies of the more important source figures in Ṭabarī's Traditions, see *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xiv-xix.

¹⁷ All the words except one which Ṭabarī quotes are to be found in the Qur'ān—*dirham* (only in its pl., *darāhim*), 19: 20; *dīnār*, 3: 75; *qalam*, 68: 1 and 96: 4; *qirtās*, 6: 7. Various etymologies have been suggested by both Islamic lexicologists and modern Western scholars for these, and similar, Qur'ānic words, e.g., that *dīnār* comes from the Greek *δηνάριον*, itself from the Latin *denarius*, and that *qalam* is from the Greek *κάλamos*, but in most cases these words are now thought to have reached Arabic via another of the semitic languages or Pahlavi. When Ṭabarī says that these are Persian words, however, he is referring to the Persian current in his own time, and not to any

ancient language. Al-Suyūfī says in his *Itqān* ([1967], pt. II, pp. 106-8) that most exegetical authorities were, like Ṭabarī, against the notion of the existence of foreign words in the Qur'ān, either reasoning along the same lines as Ṭabarī, or believing, against Ṭabarī, that it was other languages that had borrowed from Arabic, which, since it had been chosen as the vehicle for the final Revelation, must be the most complete and perfect language. The fact that Ṭabarī is here refuting the argument that these words were originally non-Arabic shows that such a view was current in his time. However, his aim is to show that such an opinion is not to be attributed to the authorities he has quoted, being only a mistaken interpretation of what they had said. Al-Suyūfī prefers the opinion, included by Ṭabarī in the following paragraph and refuted by him further on (p. 11), that there are indeed foreign words in the Qur'ān, but that since they were adopted and fully assimilated by the Arabs they are truly Arabic. His list of such words contains borrowings from Ethiopic, Persian, Greek, Indian, Syriac, Hebrew, Nabataean, Coptic, Turkish, Negro, and Berber. For a further discussion of these points, see the introduction to: A. Jeffrey (1938), and the art. 'Qur'ān' by A. T. Welch in *E.I.*^{II}, IV, esp. pp. 419-20.

¹⁸ When Ṭabarī is faced with two possible interpretations of a statement, he first has recourse to an authenticated Tradition from the Prophet (see below, nn. 42 and 57). When there is no such Tradition, the two interpretations become hypotheses of equal value, and it remains for him to ascertain which of them accommodates all the evidence. In this case certain interpreters said that some Qur'ānic expressions occurred in non-Arabic languages, while the Qur'ān says of itself that it is Arabic, so the preferred interpretation is that these expressions belong to more than one language. There is, he says, no internal contradiction in this opinion, which is therefore valid.

¹⁹ See 43: 3.

²⁰ See 16: 103.

²¹ For *ḥarf* in relation to the text of the Qur'ān, see *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xxii-xxiv.

²² For an interpretation of this Tradition, see *Intro.*, p. 31.

²³ See 2: 85; for Ṭabarī's comments see *Intro.*, p. 22.

²⁴ The *Jāhiliyya* (=lit., state, or time, of ignorance): in Islamic terminology this word refers to the pre-Islamic period.

²⁵ See 10: 57. For Ṭabarī's interpretation of the juxtaposition of the seven *ḥarḥ*s and the seven gates of the Garden, see *Intro.*, p. 29-31.

²⁶ See above, n. 21.

²⁷ The Promise and the Threat (*al-wa'd wa-l-wa'id*) is the general heading for the discussion of the subject of the reward and punishment which God has determined for His creatures. It includes such matters as the duration of the punishment in hell-fire, God's forgiveness, and human repentance. Here, Ṭabarī is referring to the passages in the Qur'ān which deal with the rewards and punishments which await the believers, the unbelievers, the doers of certain prescribed and proscribed acts, and so forth.

²⁸ For remarks on the redaction of the 'Uthmānic codex (*muṣḥaf*) and on the history of the text of the Qur'ān in general, see *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xxi-xxiv.

²⁹ See *Intro.*, p. 21, [47].

³⁰ See 5: 89.

³¹ For al-Yamāma, see above, n. 14.

³² See *Trans. Intro.*, p. xxviii.

³³ Hudhaifa b. al-Yamān is traditionally known as a secret Companion of the Prophet among the hypocrites. During the caliphates of 'Umar and 'Uthmān he held administrative posts in Iraq and led *razzias* into lands to the east and to the north.

³⁴ 'Recitation' here refers to the codex of Ubayy b. Ka'b, and in the next sentence to that of Ibn Mas'ūd. See *Trans. Intro.*, p. xxii.

³⁵ The *Muhājirūn*, the 'Emigrants', were those Muslims who emigrated from Mecca and elsewhere to Medina after the Prophet's migration (*hijra*) there in 622 (this marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar). The *Anṣār*, the 'Helpers', were those Medinese who supported the newly arrived Prophet and his Meccan followers.

³⁶ No sura has less than three verses.

³⁷ It was presumably washed in order to efface what was written on it, so that only the 'official' 'Uthmānic codex might survive. This was a common way of erasing writing on parchment or paper.

³⁸ The *Hawāzin* is one of the largest tribes of North Arabia. Ṭabarī glosses their 'hind' clans as Sa'd b. Bakr, Jusham b. Bakr, Naṣr b. Mu'āwiya (b. Bakr), and Thaqif. Quraish, to which

Muḥammad belonged, had been the dominant tribe in Mecca for something like a century before his birth. They were said to have controlled most of the trade in the region stretching from Yemen in the south to Syria in the north from the 6th century onwards. Muḥammad's difficulties in Mecca, which forced him to emigrate to Medina, were in large part due to conflict with Quraish. Khuzā'a also inhabited Mecca, and had been the most powerful tribe there before the ascendancy of Quraish. They are attributed with a generally favourable attitude towards the Prophet.

³⁹ Chains of transmission originating with Ibn 'Abbās and including Abū Šāliḥ and al-Kalbī are generally thought to be unreliable. Ṭabarī quotes another Tradition [66], from the Companion Abū 'l-Aswad al-Du'alī via Qatāda, but again he does not regard this as reliable; as the editors of the Arabic text point out, al-Du'alī died in AH 69 when Qatāda was only eight years old.

⁴⁰ See *Intro.*, pp. 18–19, [31], and p. 21, [47].

⁴¹ See 3:7.

⁴² Ṭabarī points out that this Tradition is *mursal*, i.e., it is narrated from a Follower about the Prophet but the Companion from whom he narrated it is unknown. This kind of chain of transmission renders the Tradition, according to most authorities, inadmissible as proof.

⁴³ In this passage, Ṭabarī shifts between more concrete meanings of *ḥarf* (=cutting edge, brink, border) and *wajh* (=surface, façade, front), and their more abstract meanings.

⁴⁴ See *Intro.*, p. 29, [67], and also pp. 18–19, [31].

⁴⁵ See *Intro.*, p. 16, [10 and 11].

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See *Intro.*, pp. 42–4.

⁴⁸ The jurists divide all human actions into five categories: obligatory, recommended, indifferent (i.e., the Law is indifferent as to the performance or non-performance of these actions), discouraged, forbidden. The first three of these correspond to Ṭabarī's modes of divine command. The other two are varieties of interdiction.

⁴⁹ Certain punishments (the death penalty, amputation of the hand, flogging, etc.) are laid down in the Qur'ān (for unlawful intercourse, theft, etc.), and these are known as *ḥudūd* (sing., *ḥadd*); they are rights (*ḥuqūq*, sing., *ḥaqq*) of God and cannot be altered or modified as long as all the legal conditions, which are mostly understood through explanations given in Traditions from the Prophet, are met. They contrast with punishments which are given at the discretion of the judge in cases where the legal conditions for the relevant crimes have not been fully met, or where the punishment for the crime is not a right of God.

⁵⁰ 'Dajjāl' is the name of the figure who, according to Islamic tradition, will appear before the end of time to spread corruption and tyrannically rule the world. Various signs of his coming, and descriptions of him and events associated with him, have been given in Traditions in the major collections, and it is narrated that he will be defeated and killed by Christ after his second coming, or by the promised Mahdī.

⁵¹ The desinential inflexion (*i'rāb*), the vowelism of the final consonant, does not usually appear in the writing of Arabic. The ability to establish it correctly thus implies a certain degree of competence in the language.

⁵² This Tradition is unreliable since it comes from Ibn 'Abbās via Abū Šāliḥ and al-Kalbī.

⁵³ The derivation of an interpretation by personal opinion (*ra'y*) which is discussed in this section must be understood in comparison with the other avenues to knowledge of the Qur'ān which Ṭabarī has just mentioned. The criterion for valid means to knowledge of the Qur'ān, as explained here by Ṭabarī, is whether it produces certainty or not, and in this sense authenticated Traditions from the Prophet, for example, lead to true knowledge. Another source of certain knowledge for Ṭabarī is the consensus of the experts in the relevant subject (recitation, Traditions, language), or of the Community as a whole, for these cannot be controverted. Beside these, personal opinion is considered a feeble tool, producing merely supposition instead of certainty.

⁵⁴ One class of angels in the Muslim tradition is called *muqarrab* (=brought near), meaning that they have been shown honour and brought near to God. As for *nabī mursal*, the Qur'ān refers to certain individuals, such as Muḥammad, Moses, and Jesus, as Messengers (*rasūl*, see n. 3 above), but it also refers to them, and to others, as prophets (*nabī*). There was a certain amount of disagreement as to whether there was any difference between *nabīs* and *rasūls*, but the general view is that while every *rasūl* was a *nabī*, the opposite was not the case: the *rasūl* was a *nabī* who was sent with a Message, or with a Law. In order to make this distinction, a prophet who was sent with a Message was called *nabī mursal* (= *rasūl*).

⁵⁵ Abū 'Abd Allāh Sufyān b. Sa'īd (Sa'd) b. Masrūq al-Thaurī (97/715–6–161/778). A great Kūfan Traditionist who is revered as a man of legendary piety, for which he was much persecuted by the authorities of his time. He is said to have been the author of a *Tafsīr*.

⁵⁶ Abū 'Amr b. Sharāḥl b. 'Amr al-Sha'bī (?19/640–110/728). A famous Kūfan Follower who is said to have heard Traditions from over 500 Companions.

⁵⁷ One of the methods used by Islamic scholars to determine the reliability of Traditions is to classify them on the basis of the number of persons who originally transmitted them (from, e.g., the Prophet). The most reliable, from this point of view, is the *mutawātir* Tradition, which is one that has been narrated by so many trustworthy authorities that there could not possibly be any question of its having been fabricated by collusion. It would seem that Ṭabarī is here using *naql mustafīd* (=extensive transmission) in this sense, although this latter term is sometimes also used for Traditions which are *mashhūr*, i.e., transmitted by more than two authorities, but not necessarily sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*).

⁵⁸ The word *qur'ān* is used both as a proper noun, as it is in the verses Ṭabarī quotes here, and also in the sense of a 'recitation' or 'reading', e.g., in 17: 78 and 75: 16–18 (quoted in [117, 118]). Similar dual usage occurs with the other names as well: e.g., *furqān* in 8:41 (quoted in [125]), where it is not used as a proper noun; the numerous uses of *kitāb* to refer to other scriptures; and *dhikr* in 33: 41. It is from the uses of these words when they are not referring to God's Speech as revealed to Muḥammad that Ṭabarī seeks to explain their employment as proper nouns.

⁵⁹ The verbal noun (*maṣdar*), e.g., *kitāb* (=writing), denotes the action of the verb, and is thus near to the infinitive in meaning. However, according to Ṭabarī, it may also denote the result of the action, the thing done or being done. In this respect it is similar to the English '—ing' construction, which, as in the case of 'writing' itself, may denote either the action or the result of the action, the thing that is written.

⁶⁰ This formula does not as such form part of the text of the Qur'ān, but its recitation before beginning to read or recite it is prescribed by the words of God: «When you recite the Qur'ān, seek refuge in God from Satan, the stoned» (16: 98).

⁶¹ The word *shaiḥān* is used in the Qur'ān both as a general term, as explained here, and, with the definite article, *al-*, as the name of the arch-rebel, Satan.

⁶² See 37: 10.

THE BASMALA

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

bi-smi 'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīmi

In the name of God,
the Merciful, the Compassionate

THE INTERPRETATION OF *BI-SMI* ¹

GOD, exalted is His mention, and sanctified are His Names, educated His Prophet, Muḥammad, teaching him to preface his actions with the mention of His Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), and commanded him to attribute them to Him before every important matter. He made what He had educated him to do, and what He had taught him, a normative precedent (*sunna*) to which all mankind were to conform, a path along which they were to follow him; and they were to commence their utterances, their letters, their writings, and their requests with it, in such a way that the explicit utterance of 'the formula' *bi-smi 'llāh* would even suffice to signify what the speaker implicitly intended to do, something which is left unsaid. That is to say, the preposition *bi-* in *bi-smi 'llāh* requires a verb to introduce it; but there is no explicit verb with it 'in the formula', so it is the hearer's knowledge of the intention of the person who says *bi-smi 'llāh* which enables him to do without the speaker having to announce explicitly what he intends. . . .

The purpose and intention behind the *basmala*

Hence it is understood, when someone says *bi-smi 'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm* and then subsequently starts 'to recite' a sura, that his very following of the formula with the recitation itself imparts the signification of his saying *bi-smi 'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm*, i.e., that his intention is: 'I recite in the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.' Similarly, someone's saying *bi-smi 'llāh* when he starts

to get up or sit down, or do anything else, imparts the signification of his utterance, which is: 'I stand in the name of God', 'I sit down in the name of God', etc. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 138]

OBJECTION: 'How can the interpretation of *bi-smi 'llāh* be as you say,¹ . . . when you know that everyone who recites the Book of God succeeds in doing so only with the help of God, and likewise with getting up, sitting down, and everything else? And, since this is the case, should one not also rather say *bi-'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm* (=through God, the Merciful, the Compassionate), rather than *bi-smi 'llāh*? For the meaning would be clearer for the hearer if one were to say 'I stand up through God, the Merciful, the Compassionate', or 'I recite through God', than if one were to say ' . . . in the name of God', since this latter might lead him to suppose that one got up or sat down through something other than God¹, i.e., through the intermediary of His name¹?²

REPLY: The purpose behind this is not what you imagine. The meaning of *bi-smi 'llāh* is 'I begin by naming³ God and invoking Him before anything else', or 'I recite with my naming God', or 'I stand up, or sit down, with my naming God and invoking Him.' One does not mean by *bi-smi 'llāh* 'I stand up through God', or 'I sit down through God.'

(...)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

When first Gabriel was sent down to Muḥammad, he said: 'O Muḥammad, say: "I seek refuge from Satan, the stoned, in the All-hearing, the All-knowing."'⁴ Then he said: 'Say: "*Bi-smi 'llāhi 'l-raḥmāni 'l-raḥīm*.'" (...) 'By this he meant:¹ 'O Muḥammad, recite with the invocation of God, your Lord. And stand and sit with the invocation of God.' [139, see 137]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF ALLĀH⁵

The interpretation of *Allāh* is, according to the meaning narrated to us from 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās: He is the One Whom everything takes as its god (*ya'lahu*), Whom all creatures worship (*ya'budu*).

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Allāh is He Who possesses 'the attributes of' divinity (*al-ulūhīya*) and 'of' being worshipped (*al-ma'būdīya*) with respect to all His creatures. [141]

(..)

'There is no dispute among the Arabs that the verb *ta'allaha* exists and means 'to be worshipped',¹ and there is no doubt that 'this is the Vth form of the possible Ist form verb *alaha*¹ which, if it were employed, would mean 'to worship Allāh'.⁶ . . .

⇒Ibn 'Abbās recited 'the variant reading of 7: 127¹: « . . . *wa-yadhara-ka wa-ilāhata-ka* . . . », 'the second half of' which he said 'meant the same as': . . . '*ibādaha-ka* . . . (= 'and leave you and' worship of you) 'instead of « . . . *wa-yadhara-ka wa-ālihata-ka* . . . » (= « . . . and leave you and your gods »)¹.⁷ It is also said: 'He¹, Pharaoh,¹ was worshipped but did not worship.' [142 and 143; see also ⇒Mujāhid, 144]

. . . What Ibn 'Abbās said shows that¹, if it existed, the verb¹ *alaha* would mean 'to worship', and that *ilāha* is the verbal noun derived from it.

(...)

Now the word *Allāh* in the Arabic language is originally from *ilāh*¹, which is also derived from the possible verb *alaha*¹. . . As in other cases of elision, the first letter of the noun, the *hamza* ('), 'together with its vowel *i*¹ drops out, and the letter *lām* (*l*), which is the second letter of the noun, contracts with the first *lām*, which is part of the definite article *al-*, and which carries no vowel, and they become a double *lām* (*ll*)¹, and so *al-(i)lāh* becomes *Allāh*¹. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF AL-RAḤMĀNI 'L-RAḤĪMI

Both *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* are derived nouns¹, of the forms *fa'lān* and *fa'il* respectively,¹ from the verb *raḥima* (=to have mercy, to be compassionate), and they both have the sense of 'one who has mercy'. 'However, they do not have exactly the same meaning.'¹ . . .

[L]: Those who have expert knowledge of Arabic are agreed that the form of *al-raḥmān* denotes a stronger quality than the form of *al-raḥīm*.

. . .

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Al-'Arzamī:

Al-rahmān 'denotes mercy' to all creatures, . . . and *al-rahīm* 'denotes mercy' to the believers. [146]

⇒ Abū Sa'īd 'al-Khudrī':

The Messenger of God said: 'Jesus, the son of Mary, said: " *Al-rahmān* is the Merciful in the next world as well as this world; *al-rahīm* is the Merciful in the next world. "' [147]

(...)

There is no reason to suppose that one of these interpretations is more correct than the other. . . . God, as *al-rahmān*, encompasses all His creatures in a general Mercy, whereas, as *al-rahīm*, He directs His specific Mercy towards some of His creatures, either in every state or only in some, either in this world or in the next or in both of them. . . . God, exalted is His praise, 'as *al-rahīm*' singles out His believing servants in this present world by the success He benevolently grants them for their obedience to Him, and their belief in Him and His Messenger, following His commands and avoiding disobedience. He withholds this success from those who attribute partners to Him, who disbelieve, who go against His commands and engage in disobedience. Moreover, God, exalted is His praise, bestows the abiding bliss and clear triumph which He has promised in the next world, in His Gardens, on those who entirely believe in Him, who hold His Messenger to be truthful, who act in obedience to Him, but not on those who attribute partners to, and disbelieve in, Him.

Clearly, God singles out the believers for His Mercy in this world and the next, just as He bestows favour and beneficence on both them and the unbelievers in this world in extending sustenance, providing 'rain-giving' clouds for their succour, bringing forth plants from the earth, 'giving them' healthy bodies and sound minds, and 'bestowing' other innumerable bounties in which the believers and the unbelievers share.

Our Lord, exalted is His praise, is *rahmān* towards all His creatures in both this and the next world, and He is *rahīm* specifically towards His believers in both this world and the next. He is *rahmān* in this world as we have just mentioned . . . 'and as He Himself said': «If you count God's blessing, you will never number it.» (14: 34 and 16: 18). . . . And 'He is *rahmān*' in the next world through His equal treatment for

all with His Justice and Judgement: He does not unjustly 'tip the scales' against a single one of 'His creatures', even by the weight of a speck of dust. . . . Each soul receives fully what it deserves. And we have already described that part of His Mercy for which He singles out the believers in this world, by which He is *rahīm* to them in it, as He, exalted is His mention, says: «He is All-compassionate (*rahīm*) to the believers» (33: 43). . . .

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Al-rahmān is 'of the form' *al-fa'lān*, and it is from the speech of the Arabs. *Al-rahmān al-rahīm* 'means': The One Who feels compassion (*al-raḥīq*), the One Who treats gently (*al-rafiq*) whoever He wishes to be Merciful towards, and Who is remote and stern towards whoever He wishes to be harsh with.' It is the same with all His Names. . . . [148]

This interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās indicates that 'the quality' by which our Lord is *rahmān* is the same as that by which He is *rahīm*, although there is a difference between 'the two nouns' as to the 'exact' sense 'of that quality'. For he takes *al-rahmān* to mean 'the One Who is compassionate towards whoever He feels compassion (*raqq*) for', while he takes *al-rahīm* to mean 'the One Who treats gently whoever He is kind with'.

This interpretation resembles the previous one . . . in that *al-rahmān* has a different meaning and interpretation from *al-rahīm*.

THIRD OPINION

⇒ 'Aṭā' al-Khurāsānī:

'Originally' there was *al-rahmān*, but when *al-rahmān* was cut off from His name, it became *al-rahmān al-rahīm*. [149]

What 'Aṭā' meant by this, God willing, is: '*Al-rahmān* was one of God's names by which none of His creatures had ever been called. When the liar Musailama⁸ called himself by this name, thereby cutting it off from Him, i.e., cutting it off from His names and applying it to himself, God, exalted is His praise, let it be known that His name was *al-rahmān al-rahīm*; . . . for no one was called *al-rahmān al-rahīm*, using both names together, except Him, exalted is His mention.' . . . This is not an unsound opinion. . . .

FOURTH OPINION: Some ignorant people have claimed that the Arabs did not formerly know of the name *al-rahmān*, that it was not in their language, and that that is why the polytheists said to the Messenger: «What is the All-merciful (*al-rahmān*)? Shall we bow ourselves to what you bid us?» (25: 60) . . .

§ Ṭabarī says that this is an erroneous view. The question is asked rhetorically, and does not mean that they did not know of the name. He quotes pre-Islamic poetry as evidence that the name was known.

Also one interpreter who was weak in the science of interpretation claimed . . . that *al-rahmān* was used figuratively to mean 'He Who possesses Mercy (*dhu 'l-rahma*)', and that *al-rahīm* was used figuratively to mean 'He Who dispenses Mercy (*al-rāhim*)' . . .

§ Ṭabarī says that there is no basis for this opinion.

★ ★ ★

WHEN the Arabs want to speak about something, they are used to mentioning its name first, then following it with its attributes and qualities. . . . Now God, exalted is His mention, has names by which none of His creatures may be called, which He reserves for Himself alone and not for them, like Allāh, *al-rahmān*, *al-khāliq* (=the Creator).

He also has names which He allowed people to call each other by, such as *al-rahīm*, *al-samīʿ* (=one who hears), *al-baṣīr* (=one who sees), *al-karīm* (=one who is generous), etc. Therefore it is necessary that those names which belong to Him and to none of His creatures be mentioned first, so that the hearer may know to whom he is directing praise and glorification; then should follow the names by which others are also called. . . . God, exalted is His mention, begins by His name Allāh, because none but He has divinity (*ulūhīya*)⁹ in any sense at all. . . .

Now 'God' speaks of Himself specifically as *al-rahmān*: «Say: 'Call upon Allāh, or call upon *al-rahmān*; whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Names Most Beautiful'» (17: 110), and He has forbidden any of His creatures to be so called, even though there are some among His creatures who deserve to be named with some of its meanings. . . . Therefore *al-rahmān* comes second to His name Allāh. However, as for His name *al-rahīm*, we have already said that it is permissible to describe someone other than Him by it. . . . This is why

His name Allāh comes before His name *al-rahmān*, and His name *al-rahmān* before His name *al-rahīm*.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī held the same opinion as we do concerning *al-rahmān*⁷, namely¹, that it is one of God's names by which none of His servants may be called.

⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī:

Al-rahmān is a forbidden name (*ism mamnūʿ*). [150]

Moreover, the community unanimously agrees that no one can be called by 'this name'¹, which makes it unnecessary to quote al-Ḥasan's, or anyone else's, opinion about this as evidence of the correctness of what we say.

¹ *Bi-smi* is formed from two words: the particle *bi-*, signifying 'with', etc., and the noun *ism*, signifying 'name'. The initial 'i' of *ism* is dropped and the two words are joined.

² This would infringe the dogma of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) by implying that an act was accomplished not by God but by His name. God alone is the ultimate agent of all acts.

³ Ṭabarī justifies his reading the substantive, viz., *ism* (=name), as a verbal noun, viz., *tasmīya* (=naming), on the grounds that such an equivalence accords in general with the linguistic practice of the Arabs.

⁴ See *Intro.*, pp. 46–7.

⁵ The name Allāh occurs 2,696 times in the Qur'ān.

⁶ Arabic philology has traditionally sought to derive the meanings of all words from their structure, and to this end the root is taken as the basis for verbs, and the verb for nouns. It is sometimes necessary, as in this case, to supply a 'non-existent' verb, i.e., one whose form follows the morphological rules of Arabic grammar but which is not used in the language, in order to derive the semantic content of a noun from its root. For further details, see *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xxxii–xxxiv.

⁷ The full verse reads: «Then said the Council of Pharaoh: 'Will you leave Moses and his people to work corruption in the land, and leave you and your gods?'»

⁸ See *Intro.*, n. 14.

⁹ In terms of Ṭabarī's interpretation of *ilāha* as 'worship', *ulūhīya* should here be thought of as signifying the property of being worshipped.

THE OPENING OF THE BOOK

I: I

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

al-ḥamdu li-'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīna

Praise belongs to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds,

THE INTERPRETATION OF *AL-ḤAMDU LI-'LLĀH*

¶ GRATITUDE (*shukr*) belongs entirely to God, exalted is His praise—and not to anything else besides Him that might be worshipped, nor to anything which He has created—for the incalculable bounties He has bestowed on His servants, incalculable¹, that is,¹ to anyone but Him. 'He has blessed them' by bringing health to the organs 'of the body' so that He might be obeyed, and by strengthening the limbs of the body with which His ordinances must be performed; 'and He has also blessed them with' the sustenance He has set forth for them in this present life of theirs, and 'with' the gift of nourishment by which He feeds them—without their having any right to claim it from Him—as well as 'with' the means, of which He has informed them and to which He has called them, which will lead 'them' to everlasting eternity in the abode of remaining in the abiding blessing. Therefore, for all this, praise (*ḥamd*) is due to our Lord, first and last.

(...)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Gabriel said to Muḥammad, may God bless both of them: 'O Muḥammad, say «*al-ḥamdu li-'llāh*».' (...) 'It' means: Gratitude to God, subservience (*al-istikhdhā*) to God, the attestation of His bounties, His guidance, His initiative, and so on. [151]

⇒ al-Ḥakam b. 'Umair:

The Prophet said: 'When you say «*al-ḥamdu li-'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīn*», you thank God, and He increases your bounty. [152]

It is said that *al-ḥamdu li-'llāh* implies praising God for His Most Beautiful Names and Attributes, whereas *al-shukru li-'llāh* implies praising God for His bounties and favours; and it has been narrated from Ka'b al-Aḥbār that he said that *al-ḥamdu li-'llāh* meant praising God, although it was not made clear in what was narrated from him which of the two senses of 'praise' which we have mentioned he intended.

⇒Ka'b b. al-Aḥbār:¹

Whoever says *al-ḥamdu li-'llāh* 'means by' that 'praise (*thanā*) to God'. [153]

⇒al-Aswad b. Sarī:

The Prophet said: 'There is nothing with which praise has more affinity than God*, which is why He praises Himself and says «*al-ḥamdu li-'llāh*».'¹ [154]

There is no disagreement among specialists in the Arabic language about the correctness of saying '*al-ḥamdu li 'llāhi shukran*'. Since they all agree on this, it is clear that *al-ḥamd* and *al-shukr* can be used interchangeably¹, i.e., that they have the same meaning¹, for . . . it is a definite mistake to extract an 'intensifying' abstract noun from *al-ḥamd* which does not have the same meaning or is not the same word.²

QUESTION: Why is the definite article, *al-*, attached to *ḥamd*, instead of *ḥamdan li-'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīn*?³

REPLY: The use of the definite article gives a meaning which is not rendered by *ḥamdan*—leaving the article out—because its inclusion serves to convey the meaning 'All 'kinds of' praise and complete gratitude belong to God', while its omission would serve to indicate only that the praising of the speaker, not all praises, belonged to God. Someone saying '*ḥamdan li-'llāh*', then, would mean 'I praise God'; but the interpretation of «*al-ḥamdu li-'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīn*» at the head of the first sura (*umm al-kitāb*) is not this, but rather what we have previously described, viz.: All praise belongs to God for His divinity (*ulūhiya*)⁴ and His bestowal on His creatures of those bounties He has bestowed on them, for 'all of' which there is no match in religion, in this world, now or in the future.

* Sh. & Sh., I, 137, *laisa shai'un aḥabba ilai-hi al-ḥamdu min Allāhi ta'ālā*.

OBJECTION: What does God mean by saying 'All praise belongs to God'? Does God praise Himself, and then teach us 'these words' so that we might say them exactly as He did? If so, why then should He have said «You only do we serve; to You alone we pray for succour» (1: 4) when He is the One who is served, not one who serves? Are these 'perhaps' the words of Gabriel or Muḥammad, the Messenger of God? For they cannot be the words of God.

REPLY: Indeed, all this is the word of God. But He praised and extolled Himself in terms befitting Him, then He taught this to His servants and imposed the recitation of it on them, making it a test and a trial for them. So He said to them: 'Say «Praise belongs to Allāh, the Lord of the realms of being», and say «Thee only do we serve; to Thee alone we pray for succour».' . . .

QUESTION: Where does He say: 'Say!?' How can the interpretation be as you say?

REPLY: We have previously pointed out that it is one of the characteristics of Arabic, when the position of a certain word is known, and there is no doubt that the hearer can understand what is omitted from the ostensive wording, to omit what the explicit words can convey on their own, especially if the word omitted is an utterance or the interpretation of an utterance. . . . This is the case with the omission 'of 'Say: . . . ' from God's words «Praise belongs to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds», since what He meant by this can be known from His saying «Thee only do we serve», i.e., that He orders His servants 'to recite'; and the meaning of the ostensive wording is adequate to bring out what has been omitted.

We narrated above [151] the tradition from Ibn 'Abbās . . . 'in which' Gabriel told Muḥammad: 'O Muḥammad, say «*al-ḥamdu li-'llāhi rabbi 'l-'ālamīn*». . . . And we have explained that Gabriel only taught Muḥammad what he was ordered to teach him. This tradition vindicates what we have said about the interpretation of this 'verse'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF RABB

. . . In the speech of the Arabs, *rabb* has several meanings. A master (*saiyid*) who is obeyed is called *rabb* (=lord, master) . . . ; a man who puts something in order, puts it right, is called *rabb* . . . ; and the

possessor of something is called its *rabb*.† . . . Our Lord (*rabb*) is the Master without peer: nothing is equal to His dominion, 'He' is the One who arranges the affair¹ of His creatures through the bounties which He liberally bestows on them, 'He is' the Owner to whom the creation and the command⁵ belong. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 155]

THE INTERPRETATION OF 'ĀLAMĪN

'Ālamūn is the plural of 'ālam (=cosmos, world), which is itself a collective noun like 'mankind', 'group', or 'army'. . . . 'Ālam is the noun 'which stands' for the 'different' kinds of communities—each kind is an 'ālam. The members of each generation of each kind are the 'ālam of that generation and that time. Mankind is an 'ālam, and all the people of a period of time are the 'ālam of that time. The jinn are an 'ālam, and so on with the other species of creation; each species is the 'ālam of its time.

(...)

This is our opinion as well as that of Ibn 'Abbās and Sa'īd b. Jubair; it is the meaning of what the commentators as a whole say.

(. .)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Rabb al-'ālamīn: the jinn and mankind. [157, 158. Also ⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair, 159, 160; ⇒ Mujāhid, 161, 162; ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 165]

(. .)

⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya:

Mankind is one 'ālam, the jinn another, and apart from these 'there are' eighteen thousand, or fourteen thousand—he was not sure—'ālam of angels over earth. Moreover, there are four corners of the earth, in each of which are three thousand five hundred 'ālam which He has created to worship Him. [164]

¹ God praises Himself with these words in this verse, because the Qur'ān is the word of God.

² Arabic verbs can take their own verbal nouns (*maṣḍars*) as indefinite objects in the accusative in order to express intensification (*ta'kid*) of the verb; they may also take *maṣḍars* of other verbs in such a position provided these other verbs have the same meaning. Here, if *shukran* (acc. of the *maṣḍar* of *shakara*) can be used correctly to intensify *al-hamd* (here itself a *maṣḍar*, but acting as a verb), then, following the preceding rule, it must have the same meaning.

³ The alternative indefinite (*hamdan*) would mean 'A praise . . .'

⁴ For *ulūhiya*, see *Exeg. The Basmala*, pp. 55, 58, and n. 9.

⁵ See 7: 54.

I: 2

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

al-rahmāni 'l-rahīmi

the Merciful, the Compassionate,

THE interpretation of *al-rahmān al-rahīm* was given in the exegesis of the *basmala*, so there is no need to repeat it here. Nor is there any need to explain why 'this phrase' is repeated here, since we did not consider the *basmala* to be a verse¹, and so there is no repetition¹. . . . 'The erroneous suggestion that it is repeated' . . . with one verse being so near the other . . . is proof for us of the error in supposing the *basmala* to be a verse. For if it were, there would indeed be a repetition of a single verse 'within the same sura' with the same meaning in precisely the same formulation, twice, with no separation. Such a thing does not exist in the Book of God, . . . and there is no space between God's pronouncement of His Names, 'the Merciful', 'the Compassionate', in the *basmala* and His pronouncement of them 'afterwards in the first sura'.

Is this an example of repetition in the Qur'ān?

OBJECTION: But «Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds» separates them.

REPLY: A number of commentators denied this, saying that here it is a case of reversed word order, and that the meaning is: Praise belongs to God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Lord of the worlds, the Sovereign over the Day of Reckoning. They cited His words «*maliki yaumi 'l-dīn* (=Sovereign over the Day of Judgement)» as evidence for the correctness of what they claimed, and said that by 'this' . . . God teaches His servant to ascribe sovereignty—according to the recitation of those who recite *malik*—, or possession—according to the recitation of those who recite *mālik*—, to Him. They said that the most appropriate thing to which His Attribute of sovereignty, or possession, could be adjacent was that Attribute which is similar to it, and that is «Lord of the worlds», which informs about His possession of all the species of creatures. 'They also said' that the most appropriate thing to which His Attribute of greatness and divinity could be adjacent is the praise of Him which is similar to it, and that is «the Merciful, the

Compassionate». So they claimed that this was a proof for them that «the Merciful, the Compassionate,» comes prior in meaning to «Lord of the worlds», although ostensibly it follows it. They argued that similar cases of this 'kind of inversion' . . . are widespread in Arabic speech, quite beyond count.

§ Ṭabarī gives further examples of inversion; one is from poetry, and another is from the Qur'ān (18: 1), where one word («*qaiyiman*») has been put after the position dictated by the meaning.

This is further evidence for the correctness of the opinion of those who deny that the 'basmala' . . . of the first sura 'counts as' a verse.

I: 3

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

maliki¹ yaumi 'l-dīni

Sovereign over the Day of Reckoning

THE INTERPRETATION OF MALIK

[R/T]: «*maliki yaumi 'l-dīni*», «*māliki yaumi 'l-dīni*», «*mālika yaumi 'l-dīni*».

§ Ṭabarī says that he has examined these readings in terms of *ḥadīth*-criticism in his *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* (not extant), and that he there indicated which of them he preferred.

But there is no disagreement among specialists in Arabic that *malik* is derived from *mulk* (= kingship, sovereignty), and *mālik* from *milk* (= possession).

[R/T] FIRST OPINION: The interpretation of the reading «*maliki yaumi 'l-dīni*» is therefore that God holds sole sovereignty over the Day of Reckoning to the exclusion of all His creatures who before then, in this world, were mighty kings contending sovereignty with Him and opposing His absolute glory, majesty, authority, and might. They will attain certainty when they meet God on the Day of Reckoning that they are 'in fact' the lowliest of the low, and that to Him, not to them or anyone else, belongs sovereignty and glory, might and splendour, as

He says in His revelation: «the day they sally forth, and naught of theirs is hidden from God. 'Whose is the Kingdom (*mulk*) today?' 'God's, the One, the Omnipotent.'» (40: 16) . . .

SECOND OPINION: The interpretation of the reading «*māliki yaumi 'l-dīni*» follows 'the Tradition below'.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

On that day, alongside Him, no one will possess judgement as 'they possess' their belongings in this world. (...) «They shall not speak, save him to whom the Merciful has given leave, and who speaks aright» (78: 38) (...); «voices will be hushed to the Merciful» (20: 108); (...) «and they intercede not save for him with whom He is well pleased.» (21: 26) [166]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The foremost interpretation of this verse, and the soundest reading, is, for us, the first, . . . because in affirming His sole sovereignty, His sole possession is confirmed, and the sovereign is more excellent than the possessor of something, since it is clear that there is no sovereignty without possession, while there can be possession without sovereignty.

§ By an argument based on the impossibility of repetition in the Qur'ān similar to his argument in the previous verse, Ṭabarī reinforces his case for reading «*malik*» (= sovereign).

The interpretation of the reading *mālika yaumi 'l-dīn* is 'O Possessor of the Day of Reckoning', indicating by the vocative ending -a the intention to make an appeal or a supplication.

§ Ṭabarī explains and rejects the reasoning behind this reading, viz., that this verse connects to the next verse rather than to the preceding one.

The reading *mālika* is disallowed, because of the congruence (*ijmā'*) of all the arguments of the reciters and scholars of the Community rejecting it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF YAUMI 'L- DĪN

The 'word' *dīn* is, in this place, to be interpreted as meaning the 'drawing up of an' account', and the 'requital for acts done', . . . as, for example, in God's saying: «No indeed, but you cry lies to the *dīn*»—i.e.,

to the requital—«yet there are over you watchers 'noble, writers who know whatever you do'» (82: 9 and 10), i.e., 'watchers who' enumerate the acts you do. . . . The 'word' *dīn* also has other meanings in Arabic, apart from 'account' and 'requital', which we shall mention in the appropriate places, God willing.²

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Yaumi 'l-dīn is the Day on which the accounts of 'all' created beings are drawn up. It is the Day of the Resurrection (*qiyāma*), when 'God' requites their acts: good for good, and evil for evil—except for him whom He forgives. For His is the Command. (...) «Verily, His are the Creation and the Command.» (7: 54) [167, a continuation of 166. See also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, and a group of Companions, 168;³ ⇒ Qatāda, 169; ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 170]

¹ For this, Ṭabarī's preferred reading, see the exegesis of the verse.

² See also *Intro.* n. 5.

³ This is one of Ṭabarī's most frequently used *isnād*'s. The key transmitter in the chain is Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 128/745), a Follower, and an important Kūfān collector of Traditions. Aḥmad Shākir, one of the two editors of the Cairo edition of Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, expressed the opinion that al-Suddī may have gathered all these interpretative Traditions in a commentary on the Qur'ān, giving it a collective *isnād*, although some were from Ibn 'Abbās (through two intermediaries), some from Ibn Mas'ūd (through one intermediary), and some direct from other Companions.

I: 4

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

iyyāka na'budu wa-iyyāka nasta'īnu

You only do we worship, to You alone we pray for succour.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *IYYĀKA NA'BUDU*

¶ BEFORE You, O our God, do we humble ourselves, make ourselves lowly and submit ourselves, confessing, O our Lord, that lordship belongs to You and to no one else.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Gabriel said to Muḥammad: 'O Muḥammad, say: "*Iyyāka*

na'budu."» 'This means: 'You do we declare to be One, 'You' do we fear, and 'You' do we hope for, O our Lord, and no one else. [171]

This conforms with what we have said, only we chose to explain the interpretation in terms of humility, lowliness, and submission, rather than those of hope and fear. But hope and fear only come with submissiveness, because service (*'ubūdiyya*), according to all the Arabs, is founded on submissiveness, which is why they call a path which is well trodden and well beaten *mu'abbad* (=passable, it is the passive participle of *'abbada*, meaning 'subjugated').† . . . Similarly, a slave or a servant is called *'abd* because of his submission to his master. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF *IYYĀKA NASTA'ĪNU*

¶ To You, O our Lord, do we pray for succour to worship You and obey You in all our affairs, not to anyone else, since whoever rejects 'faith in' You asks the idol which he worships for succour in his affairs, whereas we pray to You for help in all our affairs, devoting ourselves to worship of You.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'«*Wa-iyyāka nasta'īn*» means: 'To You do we pray for succour to obey You and in all our affairs. [172]

OBJECTION: What meaning is there in God's ordering His servants to ask for help to obey him? Is it conceivable that, having ordered them to obey Him, He would not help them to obey? Can anyone say to his Lord: 'To You do we pray for succour to obey You', without being helped 'even' to say this? This is obedience anyway. What reason could a servant have for asking his Lord for what He has already given him?

REPLY: This interpretation is not coherent. The supplicating believer is only asking his Lord to help him to obey Him in the matters of obedience He requires of him in what remains of his life, not in what he has already done or in those righteous acts which he has already performed in that part of his life which has passed. The servant is permitted to ask his Lord for this because for God to give His servant this, as well as for Him to add strength to his limbs so that he can carry out the matters of obedience He requires of him and the religious duties

He has imposed on him, is a favour from Him which He freely grants him, and a grace by which He shows kindness towards him. However, 'it must not be thought that' there is any flaw in the 'divine' plan, nor any injustice in 'divine' governance, if, in the order of things, He fails to bestow His favour by 'not' giving success to some servant of His who is engaged in disobedience towards Him and is not displaying love for Him, or if He extends His favour to another who is striving to love Him and hastening to obey Him. It is quite possible that the ignorant person may not understand the object of God's ruling when He commands His servant to beseech Him for His help in obeying Him.

In this command to His servants to say «You only do we worship, to You alone we pray for succour», which means that they should ask Him for help in worshipping Him, is to be found the best proof of the error of those proponents of free will (*ahl al-qadar*) who believe that

independence of action (*tafwīd*)¹ has been conferred on man. These people claim that God can only command one of His servants to do something, or impose some duty on him, after giving him help so that he 'becomes capable of' either doing or not doing it. If what they claim were true, 'to express' a wish that God might help 'His servant' obey Him would be quite redundant, for, according to them, and given the reality of the divine command and prohibition and of human obligation before God (*taklīf*), God would necessarily have a duty to help His servant, whether he asked for the help or not. Indeed, not to give him His help would, in their view, be a 'divine' injustice.

If things were as these people claim, to say «You only do we worship, to You alone we pray for succour» would merely be to ask God not to be unjust. But all Muslims agree in approving the supplication 'O our God, we pray to You for succour', and in condemning the supplication 'O our God, do not be unjust towards us', and this is a clear proof of the error of those whose opinion I have just described. For what the utterer of the first sentence means to say, according to them, is: 'O our God, do not withhold Your help from us, for to deprive us thereof would be an injustice from You.'

OBJECTION: How can it be correct to say «You only do we worship, to You alone we pray for succour», putting the statement about worship before the request for help in doing so? Worship can only be accomplished with 'divine' assistance, so asking for help should more properly come before the action for which help is required.

Argument
against
free will

REPLY: It is quite clear that there is no way the servant can worship without the assistance of God. And it would be impossible either for him to worship without being helped to do so, or for him to be helped to do so without performing the act 'of worshipping'. So it is the same whichever of these two comes first. It is just like speaking to a man who has done something you required and has thereby done you a good turn. It is all the same whether you say 'You have done what I needed and have served me well', preceding the commendation by the statement about what he has done; or whether you say 'You have served me well and have done what I wanted', putting things the other way around. For there could be no doing what you needed done without it being to your advantage, nor any advantage to you without it being something you needed done.

§ There follow further objections and replies concerning the rhetoric of the verse.

¹ By *tafwīd* (=authorization) Tabarī means the doctrine of man's ability to choose to do or not to do any action, a doctrine upheld by the Mu'tazilites and those who adopted their theology. Tabarī's argument is based on the premiss that the choice is ultimately made by God.

I: 5

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

ihdi-na 'l-ṣirāṭa 'l-mustaqīma

Guide us in the straight path,

THE INTERPRETATION OF *IHDI-NĀ*

FIRST OPINION: According to our opinion, the meaning of *ihdi-na* here is 'cause us to persevere successfully' in the straight path.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Gabriel said to Muḥammad: 'O Muḥammad, say: «*Ihdi-na 'l-ṣirāṭa 'l-mustaqīm*».' 'This' means: Inspire us 'to follow' the guiding way. [173, complete version in 179]

'His' inspiring (*ilhām*) 'His servant' to follow this way is His causing 'him' to succeed (*tawfīq*) in it, as we interpreted it above. The meaning

is a parallel to the meaning of «to You we pray for succour», where the servant asks his Lord to grant him success in persevering in obedience to Him in his actions, in reaching the truth, and in being correct in what He has commanded and prohibited, in the life that remains before him, and not in those of his actions which are over and done with in 'the part of' his life which is past. . . .

¶ vs. 4, 5 and 6: O our God, You do we serve—You who are the One without any partner—worshipping You sincerely, and nothing else besides You—no divinity or idols. Help us to serve You, and cause us to succeed where You have caused those whom You have blessed to succeed—Your prophets, and those who obey You—on the 'right' track and in the 'right' way.

(...)

SECOND OPINION: Some have claimed that *ihdi-nā* should be interpreted as 'increase guidance for us'. This could mean one of two things. Someone who interprets it in this way must suppose that the Prophet was commanded to ask his Lord either for greater clarification, or for greater help and more success. There is no reason to suppose the former, for God never makes a servant responsible for a duty without first explaining it to him and setting up a proof¹ of it for him. So if this 'word' meant a request by the Prophet for clarification, he would have been being commanded to supplicate his Lord for a clarification of the duties He had imposed on him, which would be the reverse of a supplication. For He never imposes a duty without making it clear to whoever He is imposing it on. Or he would have been being commanded to ask his Lord to impose duties on him which He has not proclaimed. As 'it is evident that' it is an error for a servant to ask his Lord for this, it becomes quite clear that «Guide us in the straight path» does not mean 'Make Your duties and ordinances clear to me.'

HARMONIZATION OF THE FIRST AND SECOND OPINIONS: As for the proposal that 'the Prophet' is being commanded to ask for greater help and more success, if this were the case, it could either be that he is to ask for more help for his past actions or for his coming actions. But from the fact that he has no need of help for his past actions, it must be a question of his coming actions. Therefore the command comes to mean the same as what we have already explained, i.e., that the servant should ask his Lord to grant him success in carrying out the duties He has required of him in what remains to him of his life.

§ Ṭabarī uses his interpretation as further proof of the error of the proponents of free will who claim that God must help everyone to follow His commands.²

THIRD OPINION: Some have claimed that the meaning of this verse is 'cause us to follow the path of Paradise in the Return (*ma'ād*)', i.e., 'direct us to it and cause us to proceed along it.' 'This interpretation follows the meaning of the verse' «guide them (*ihdū-hum*) unto (*ilā*) the path of Hell!» (37: 23), i.e., 'cause them to enter the Fire'. . . . However, the incorrectness of this interpretation is obvious from the verse itself and from the commentators' proof. All the commentators among the Companions and the Followers agree that *ṣirāṭ* here means something quite different from what these interpreters say, that «to You we pray for succour» is a request from the servant to his Lord for help in serving Him, and that «guide us» is a plea for continued guidance in what remains of his life.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *AL-ṢIRĀṬA 'L-MUSTAQĪMA*

There is a consensus among interpreters that *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is the clear road which is without any crookedness.† . . . Moreover, the Arabs have taken *ṣirāṭ* and employed it as an expression for any kind of word or deed which could be described as straight or crooked. . . . In our opinion, the best interpretation of this verse 'together with the next' is: Cause us to persevere successfully in what pleases You, and in the words and deeds in which You have caused those of Your servants on whom You have bestowed favour to succeed. This is the 'straight path', because he who succeeds where the prophets, the veracious (*ṣiddīqūn*),³ and the martyrs, on whom God has bestowed favour, have succeeded, succeeds in Islam, in believing in the prophets, in adhering to the Book, in doing what God commands, and in restraining himself from what He holds 'His servants' back from, in following the course the Prophet took, the way of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, and of every devout servant of God. All this is the 'straight path'.

[T] The interpreters differed about the meaning of the 'straight path', but all their interpretations are contained in the interpretation we have preferred here.

⇒ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib:

The Prophet mentioned the Qur'ān, and said: 'This is the "straight path".' [174, 175]

(..)

⇒'Abd Allāh 'b. 'Abbās':

The 'straight path' is the Book of God. [177]

⇒Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh:

«Guide us in the straight path»—Islam, which is wider than what is between heaven and earth. [178]

⇒'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās:

Gabriel said to Muḥammad: 'O Muḥammad, say «Guide us in the straight path».' 'This' means: Inspire us 'to follow' the guiding way, which is the religion of God, which is without crookedness.' [179. See also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 180; ⇒Ibn al-Ḥanaṣṣīya, 181; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 182; ⇒Ibn Juraij, 183; ⇒Ibn Zaid b. Aslam, 185; ⇒Nawwās b. Sam'ān al-Anṣārī, from the Messenger of God, 186, 187]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya 'and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī':

'The 'straight path' is the Messenger of Allāh, and his two companions after him, Abū Bakr and 'Umar. . . [184]

God describes 'the path' as 'straight' because it 'holds true' and there is no error in it. Some foolish people claimed that God called it 'straight' because it led those who travelled it straight to the Garden, but this interpretation contradicts the interpretation of all the interpreters, and this . . . suffices to show that it is wrong.

¹ *Ḥujja* (= Proof) is used in contexts such as this to mean an indication which God provides to give His servant certainty that it is his duty to do a certain thing.

² See *Exeg.* 1: 4, pp. 69–71.

³ See 4: 69 and 57: 19.

1:6

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

ṣirāṭa 'lladhīna an'amta 'alay-him

the path of those on whom You have bestowed 'favour',

THIS verse is a clarification of the 'straight path', i.e.¹, it answers the question¹: 'Whose path?'. For every path of truth is a straight path, and Muḥammad was told: 'O Muḥammad, say: "Guide us, O our Lord, in the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed the favour of obedience to, and worship of, You—Your angels, Your prophets, the veracious, the martyrs, and the righteous."'² This is a parallel to what our Lord said in His Revelation: «Yet if they³, i.e., those to whom the Revelation was sent,¹ had done as they were admonished it would have been better for them, and stronger confirming * and then We surely would have given them from Us a mighty wage, * and guided them in a straight path. * Whosoever obeys God, and the Messenger—these are those on whom God has bestowed favour, the prophets, the veracious, the martyrs, the righteous» (4: 66–9). . . .

A Tradition from Ibn 'Abbās [188] confirms what we have said.

§ Further Traditions interpret «those on whom You have bestowed favour» as the believers [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 190] and the Muslims [⇒Wakī', 191].

(..)

This verse offers 'further' clear indication that those who obey God only reach obedience by God's favour to them in this respect, by His causing them to succeed therein. . . .

1:7

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

ghairi 'l-maghḍūbi 'alay-him wa-la 'l-dāllīna

not of those who have incurred 'Your' wrath, nor of those who are astray.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *GHAIRI 'L-MAGHḌŪBI 'ALAY-HIM*

[R/L] «*GHAIR*»: FIRST OPINION: The experts in the recitation of the Qur'ān are in agreement on the reading «*ghairi*»¹, as opposed to «*ghaira*», for which see below¹.

§ Ṭabarī gives two arguments for the reading «*ghairi*» based on the possibilities of syntax. In one, the exceptive clause is taken to be attached adjectivally to 'those whom' in the previous verse, giving 'the path of those whom You have blessed, who are those who have not incurred 'Your' wrath'. In the other, the exceptive clause is attached to 'path', giving 'the path of those whom You have blessed, the path of those who have not incurred 'Your' wrath'.

Although 'there are' . . . two interpretations of the verse based on different reasons for the final vowel (-i), they both give nearly the same meaning, because whomsoever God bestows His favour on and whomsoever He guides to His true religion is secure from His wrath and rescued from going astray in his religion. . . .

§ Ṭabarī's argument is that in the second interpretation where there is mention of two groups, a moment's reflection makes it clear that those on whom God bestows His blessing must also be saved from His wrath; it would be impossible for God to be pleased with someone and angry with him, to guide him and lead him astray, at the same time. The group of the favoured thus also has the same attributes as the group with whom God is not wrathful and whom He does not lead astray. Therefore, the two different syntactical readings give the same meaning, the first directly, the second through a simple step of reasoning.

SECOND OPINION: It is possible to read «*ghaira*»—in the accusative—in this verse, although I am averse to reading it thus because it is a deviation from the reading of the recitation experts, and whoever departs from the readings as they have come down to the Community by extensive, clear transmissions, adopts a view contrary to the truth,

veers away from the way of God, the way of the Prophet, and the way of the Muslims, even if, were its recitation to be permissible, 'the variant'¹ could be found to have a sound explanation.

The interpretation which makes «*ghaira*» sound . . . is . . . 'the path of those whom You have guided—bestowing favours on them, not being wrathful against them—not of those who are astray'. . . .

§ Ṭabarī then gives the interpretation of one of the Baṣran grammarians based on the reading «*ghaira*», which is 'Guide us in the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed favour, but excluding those who have incurred 'Your' wrath.' The Kūfan grammarians reject this interpretation as weak, saying that *ghair* is not used here to exclude but to negate: ' . . . not of those who have incurred 'Your' wrath, nor of those who are astray'.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: Although we previously decided to undertake 'only' the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'ān in this book, we have inserted these expositions of the reasons for 'different' desinential inflexions¹ because therein lie different reasons for interpretation. . . . But the correct reading is, in our opinion, the first, «*ghairi 'l-maghḍūbi 'alay-him*», and the correct interpretation 'is the one which follows from this reading, for which see below'¹. . . .

QUESTION: Who are those who incur 'divine' wrath, about whom God commands us to ask Him that He make us not one of them?

REPLY: They are those whom God describes in His Revelation thus: «Say: 'Shall I tell you of a recompense with God, worse than that? Whomsoever God has cursed, and with whom He is wroth (*ghaḍība 'alay-hi*), and made some of them apes and swine, and worshippers of idols (*tāghūt*)—they are worse situated, and have gone further astray from the right way.'» (5: 60) God informs us here of the punishment which befell them for having disobeyed Him; then He informs us, as an act of kindness towards us, how we can be rescued from having the exemplary punishment which befell them befall us, and this is a mercy from God for us.

§ To prove that those who have incurred God's wrath are those mentioned in 5: 60, Ṭabarī cites several Traditions [193–206] which name the Jews as those with whom God is angry. For the interpretation of 5: 60 as referring to the Jews, see *Exeg.* 5: 60.

There is disagreement about the attribute of wrath in connection with God. Some say that God's wrath against one of His creatures . . . consists in His meting out His punishment to him either in his worldly life or in his afterlife, as He Himself has described: «So, when they had angered

Us, We took vengeance upon them, and We drowned them all together» (43: 55), and also 5: 60 'cited above'. Others say that God's wrath against those He is angry with is a censure of them and their actions on His part, His verbal castigation of them. And yet others say that His 'wrath' has a conceptual meaning similar to that which is understood from the various 'ordinary' meanings of 'wrath', although . . . there is a difference 'in reality' between God's wrath and . . . men's wrath; 'for men's wrath' rouses and agitates them, is oppressive for them and causes them harm. However, no defects inhere in His essence. Rather it is one of His attributes, like knowledge or power . . .—even if the significations of 'His knowledge' are different from those of man's knowledge, which is the perceptions of the heart, or of 'man's' powers, which come into being with actions, and are non-existent when the 'se latter' are non-existent.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA 'L-DĀLLĪNA

§ Ṭabarī gives the explanations of a Baṣran and a Kūfan grammarian of the particle «lā» in accordance with their explanations of «ghair» summarized above. Ṭabarī prefers the Kūfan opinion which explains «ghair» as negating and «wa-lā» as continuing the negation (= not . . . , nor . . .). The Baṣran is Abū 'Ubaida, and the Kūfan al-Farrā'.²

¶ Lead us on the path of those on whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have incurred 'Your' wrath, nor of those who are astray.

(...)

'Those who are astray' are those whom God has described in His Revelation: «'People of the Book, go not beyond the bounds in your religion, other than the truth, and follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led many astray, and now again have gone astray from the right way.'» (5: 77)

§ Using the same reasoning as before, in order to prove that the people mentioned in 5: 77 are those who are described as astray in 1: 7, Ṭabarī cites Traditions [207–220] which name the Christians as those astray. For the interpretation of 5: 77 as referring to Christians, see *Exeg.* 5: 77. But although

the Jews are called 'those who have incurred God's wrath' and the Christians 'those who are astray', both groups, according to Ṭabarī, have both attributes. He also takes the opportunity to refute another argument of the Qadārīya,³ who upheld the doctrine of free will. Some of them claimed that the fact that God did not say that He had led the Christians astray, or that He had made the Jews objects of His wrath, but that they had gone astray and incurred His wrath respectively, proved their opinion that man was free to choose what he did. Ṭabarī argues against this position on the grounds that its proponents had a limited knowledge of Arabic and of causality, and he affirms that God is the real cause of man's actions.

* * *

A QUESTION THAT HERETICS WHO DEFAME THE QUR'ĀN ASK

OBJECTION: You began this book of yours by describing clarity of expression (*bayān*), 'stating' that the highest degree and the most elevated status of it is that which is most expressive in explaining the purpose of the explainer, clearest in regard to the intention of the speaker, and closest to the understanding of anyone who heard it. You said, moreover, that the discourse most worthy of being thus 'called' is the Discourse of God, because of its excellence over all other discourses in being at the summit of the degrees of clear discourse.⁴ So what is the reason, if it is as you describe it, for the lengthening of the Discourse, as 'in this' sura, the *umm al-kitāb*, to seven verses? Surely all the meanings in this sura are contained in verses 3 and 4, since there can be no doubt that whoever understands what «Sovereign over the Day of Reckoning» means will also know Him by His Most Beautiful Names and His Most Perfect Attributes. And whoever obeys God must, without doubt, follow in his religion the path of those on whom God has bestowed favour, and must deviate from the path of those who have incurred 'His' wrath and are astray. What more wisdom is there in the five other verses apart from that which is contained in the two verses mentioned?

REPLY: God, exalted is His mention, brought together for our Prophet, Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, in the Book revealed to him, meanings which He had never assembled in any Book He had revealed to a previous prophet, or to any previous community. For all the Books He had previously revealed to His prophets were revealed with only some of the meanings assembled in the Book revealed to Muḥammad: for example, the Torah, which is religious exhortations

The perfection of the Qur'ān's meanings

(*mawā'iz*) and detailed setting forth (*tafsīl*), and the Psalms, which are great praising and glorification, and the Evangel, which is religious exhortations and a reminder (*tadhkīr*). In none of these was there any miracle attesting the truthfulness of the one who received the Revelation. But the Book revealed to Muḥammad contained all these meanings, as well as many more missing from these other Books. We have already mentioned these things in this book.⁵

Among the most noble of the meanings by which our Book is distinguished over previous scriptures are its marvellous order, its extraordinary formal coherence, and the unique nature of its compositional structure. Orators cannot match the orderly arrangement of 'even' its shortest pieces, rhetoricians exhaust themselves trying to describe the form of 'even' a part of it, poets are baffled by its composition. And the understanding of intellectuals becomes dull witted before it, incapable as they are of imitating it; for they can do nothing when faced by it but submit and affirm that it comes from the One, the Vanquisher. Moreover, it contains 'other' meanings not assembled in any other Book brought down from heaven to earth: passages which attract (*targīb*) and passages which instill fear (*tarhīb*), imperatives to act and imperatives to refrain from acting, and narrative, dialectics, and parables.

However protracted parts of it may be, as in the first sura, God wished, as we have previously said, 'first' to assemble the proof of the prophethood of our Prophet Muḥammad—through its extraordinary formal coherence and remarkable order, with its renunciation of the metres of the poets, the rhymed prose of the soothsayers,⁶ the speeches of the orators, the eloquent epistles of the rhetoricians; through the inability of all mankind to imitate its form, and of all God's servants to create as orderly an arrangement. 'Secondly, He wished to assemble,' through the praise, glorification, and eulogy which it contains, that which would inform His servants of His glory, His authority, His power, and the magnificence of His Kingdom, so that they would remember His blessings, give praise for His favours, and thereby be worthy of more from Him, and merit His abundant reward. 'Thirdly, He wished to assemble,' through the description which it contains of those on whom He has bestowed knowledge of Him and granted success in following Him, that which would inform His servants that all the bounties which befall them in their religion and in their worldly life come from Him, so that they would direct their longing towards

The excellence of the Qur'ān's structure

The economy of the divine discourse

Him, and seek their needs from Him and not from anything 'they might think' equal to Him—other divinities or partners. 'Fourthly, He wished to assemble,' through mentioning in it the exemplary retribution He brought down on those who disobeyed Him, and the punishments which befell those who went against His command, that which would cause His servants to fear perpetrating acts of disobedience to Him and exposing themselves to His anger, against which they have no power, thereby 'causing Him' to deal with them in punishment and retribution in the way 'He deals with' the damned who have perpetrated these things.

This is the reason for the extended discourse of the first sura, as well as of the similar parts of the other suras of the Furqān. It is the far-reaching Wisdom, the perfect Proof.

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'When the servant says «Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds», God says "My servant has praised Me." When he says «the Merciful, the Compassionate», He says "My servant has lauded Me." When he says «Sovereign over the Day of Reckoning», He says "My servant has glorified Me, indeed this is for Me." When he says «You only do we worship, to You alone we pray for succour», up to the end of the sura, He says "Indeed, this is for him." [221-3]

⇒ Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī:

The Messenger of God said: 'God said: "I have divided the prayer (*ṣalāt*) between Myself and My servant into two halves; he shall have what he has asked for." When the servant says «Praise belongs to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds», God says "My servant has praised me." When he says «the Merciful, the Compassionate», He says "My servant has lauded Me." When he says «Sovereign over the Day of Reckoning», He says "My servant has glorified Me." He says "This is for Me, the rest is for him." [224]

¹ See *Intro*, n. 51.

² See *Sh. & Sh.*, I, 190, ns. 4 and 5, and *Trans. Intro.*, p. xiii.

³ See *Exeg.* 1: 4, pp. 69-71.

⁴ See *Intro.*, p. 9 and n. 11.

⁵ See *Intro.*, p. 30-31.

⁶ See *Intro.*, p. 10 and n. 12.

THE SURA IN WHICH THE COW (BAQARA) IS MENTIONED

2: 1

الْم

alif—lām—mīm

THE INTERPRETATION OF 「THE LETTERS」

*ALIF—LĀM—MĪM*¹

[T] FIRST OPINION: Some of the exegetes said that it is one of the names of the Qur'ān. [⇒Qatāda, 225; ⇒Mujāhid, 226; ⇒Ibn Juraij, 227]

SECOND OPINION: And some said they are opening 「letters」 by which God begins the Qur'ān. [⇒Mujāhid, 228]

(..)

THIRD OPINION: And others said it is a name of the sura.

⇒'Abd Allāh b. Wāḥb:

I asked 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid b. Aslam about the words of God: «*Alif—lām—mīm* * *dhālika 'l-kitāb*», «*Alif—lām—mīm* * *tanzīl*», and «*Alif—lām—mīm—rā* * *tilka*» (suras 2, 32, and 13 respectively). He said: 'My father', Zaid b. Aslam,¹ said: "They are nothing but the names of the suras." [232]

FOURTH OPINION: And some said it is the greatest Name of God.

⇒Al-Suddī:

Ibn 'Abbās said¹, concerning «*Ḥā—mīm*» (suras 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46), «*Ṭā—sīn—mīm*» (suras 26 and 28) and «*Alif—lām—mīm*» (suras 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, and 32)¹: 'They are the greatest Name of God.' [233, and ⇒Al-Suddī ⇒Murrat al-Ḥamadānī, 234]

⇒ Al-Sha'bī:

The openings of the suras are among the Names of God. [235]

FIFTH OPINION: And some said it is an oath which God used, and is one of His Names [⇒ 'Ikrima, 237]

SIXTH OPINION: And some said they are discrete letters from nouns and verbs, each letter standing for a different meaning.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Alif—lām—mīm» means: ¹ *Ana 'llāhu a'lam* (=I. God, most knowing). [238, and ⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair, 239]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«Alif—lām—mīm» is an 'acronym' derived from letters of Names of God, exalted is His praise. [240]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Alif—lām—mīm», «Hā'—mīm» and «Nūn» (sura 68) are 'acronym's'. [241]

SEVENTH OPINION: And some said they are letters of a posited alphabet.

⇒ Mujāhid:

All the opening 'letters' of the suras, «Qāf» (50), «Ṣād» (38), «Hā'—mīm», «Ṭā'—sīn—mīm», and the others, are a posited alphabet.² [242]

EIGHTH OPINION: And some said that each of the letters comprises various different meanings.

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

All languages have in common these 'three' letters out of the twenty-nine 'of the Arabic alphabet'.³ Each one of them is the key of one of His Names; each one of them is in 'one of the names of' His blessings and His trials; each one of them is in the duration and term of a people. Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'How wondrous! They speak 'using the letters which stand for' His Names, and they live through His sustenance. How can they deny Him?' (...) The *alif* is the key of His Name 'Allāh', the *lām* of His Name 'laṭīf' (= 'the' Gentle), and the *mīm* of His Name 'majīd'

(= 'the' Glorious); the *alif* stands for the blessings (*ālā'*) of God, the *lām* for His Gentleness (*lutf*), and the *mīm* for His Glory (*majd*); the *alif* is one year, the *lām* thirty, and the *mīm* forty.⁴ [243 and 244]

NINTH OPINION: And others said they are letters used according to their numerical values,⁵ but we disapprove of citing the one of whom this is related because his transmitter is one whose narrations and reports are not trustworthy. Moreover, a similar tradition has just been given from al-Rabī' b. Anas.

TENTH OPINION: And some of them said that every scripture has a secret, and the secret of the Qur'ān is its opening 'letters'.

[L] FIRST OPINION: Some of them have said they are some of the letters of the alphabet, and the mention of those of them which are mentioned at the beginnings of the suras means that the mention of the rest of them, which amount to twenty-eight letters in all, is redundant. This is just the same as someone saying 'ABC' and not needing to mention the other letters 'of the alphabet'. . . . From this point of view, the next phrase in the sura, «This is the Book», is in the nominative because the phrase means: There is no doubt in all of 'these': the *alif*, the *lām*, and the *mīm*, from the individual letters 'of the alphabet, and' this Book which has been sent down to you.

(...)

SECOND OPINION: And others said instead that the beginnings of the suras started with these 'letters' because the polytheists, whose attitude was to avoid 'listening to' the Qur'ān, would prick up their ears when they heard them; then, whenever they gave ear, that which was composed of 'the letters' would be recited to them.

THIRD OPINION: And one said that the letters which open the suras are 'just' letters with which God begins His speech. To the objection that there cannot be anything in the Qur'ān which has no meaning, there is the reply that He begins with them so that it may be known that the previous sura has come to an end and that He has started another; He has made them a sign for the break between them. ‡

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

§ Ṭabarī goes through the opinions which he has described, giving further facets which arise from them: those who said that «alif—lām—mīm» is a name

for the Qur'ān may either have meant the whole Qur'ān, so that the beginning of the second sura is a kind of oath: 'By the Qur'ān, . . .'; or they may have meant that the letters are the name of the sura which thus may be referred to in short form by its letters.

Now those who said that these are opening 'letters' with which God begins His speech make a similar claim to that of the Arabic expert who, as we have narrated, said that it is an indication that one sura has been finished and another is being started, a sign of the break between them.†

Those who said they are discrete letters, some from God's Names, others from His attributes, and that every letter has a different meaning from every other letter, follow a poetic convention in their interpretation.

§ Ṭabarī gives examples from ordinary speech and poetry where single letters or shortened words are used as abbreviations for words, and a Tradition [=Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, 245], where an initial letter is used to refer to an action.

As for those who said that each letter in «*alif—lām—mīm*» and similar expressions indicates various meanings, in the way we mentioned from al-Rabī' b. Anas, they offered the same kind of solution as 'did the previous group' who said that it is to be interpreted as *ana 'llāhu a'lam* in that every letter in it is one letter of a complete word, and that there is no need to mention the whole word because it is indicated by 'the letter'. However, they differed from them with respect to 'what' each of these letters 'stands for': whether it is from the word which the first group claimed it comes from, or from another 'word'. They said that in fact the *alif* in «*alif—lām—mīm*» is from a variety of words and signifies the meanings of all of them. They said that each of these letters is singled out and isolated from the rest of the letters of this word only because if all the letters of the word were presented, the word which appeared—of which one of these separate letters would be a constituent—would only signify a single meaning, not two or more. . . . 'Therefore,' since God wished to signify by each of the letters of 'the expression' many meanings belonging to one thing, it was necessary to isolate the letter which indicated these meanings, so that the people to whom it was directed might know that God did not intend to give just one meaning and to signify just one thing by what He addressed to them, but that He intended to signify many things by it.

(...)

§ The significance of the former theory, according to Ṭabarī, is that God

opens His speech by describing Himself as the Omniscient from Whom nothing is concealed, and makes this a precedent to be followed by His servants in opening their speech, letters, and important tasks, in the same way as He begins other suras with complete phrases which glorify and praise Him, e.g., «Glory be to Him, Who carried His servant by night» (17: 1).

As for those who said that they are letters according to their numerical values rather than with any different meanings, they argued that we know of no comprehensible meaning for the isolated letters except the numerical values, . . . and God cannot possibly address His servants except using 'expressions' they can understand. . . . They also relied on 'the following Tradition' for their opinion.

⇒ Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ri'āb:

Abū Yāsir b. Akḥṭab passed by the Messenger of God who was reciting the opening of the sura of the Cow: «*alif—lām—mīm* * This is the book wherein is no doubt». He came to his brother, Ḥuyaiy b. Akḥṭab, among some Jews, and said: 'By God, do you know that I heard Muḥammad recite from what God has sent down to him: «*Alif—lām—mīm* * This is the Book, wherein is no doubt?»' They said: 'You heard him 'say that'?' He said 'Yes.'

Then Ḥuyaiy b. Akḥṭab went to the Messenger of God with that group of Jews, and they said: 'O Muḥammad, has it not been mentioned to us that you recite «*Alif—lām—mīm* * This is the Book wherein is no doubt» in what has been sent down to you?'

Then the Messenger said: 'Yes, indeed.' So they said: 'Did Gabriel bring you this from God?' He said: 'Yes.' Then they said: 'God, exalted is His praise, sent prophets before you, but we are not aware that He explained to any of them the duration of his authority and how long his community would be sustained except to you.'

Then Ḥuyaiy b. Akḥṭab turned to those who were with him and said to them: 'The *alif* is "one", the *lām* "thirty", and the *mīm* "forty". This makes 71 years. Will you enter the religion of a prophet the duration of whose authority and the life of whose community is only 71 years?'

Then he turned to the Messenger of God and said: 'O Muḥammad, were there any more 'letters' with these?' He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'What were they?' He said: '«*Alif—lām—mīm—šād*».' 'This is more important and longer: the *alif* is "one", the

lām "thirty", the *mīm* "forty", and the *ṣād* "ninety". This makes 161 years. Are there any more than this, O Muḥammad?

He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'What are they?' He said: «*Alif—lām—rā*».' He said: 'By God, this is more important and longer: the *alif* is "one", the *lām* "thirty", and the *rā* "two hundred". This makes 231 years. Are there any more than this, O Muḥammad?

He said: 'Yes. «*Alif—lām—mīm—rā*».' He said: 'By Allāh, this is more important and longer: the *alif* is "one", the *lām* "thirty", the *mīm* "forty", and the *rā* "two hundred". This makes 271 years.'

Then he said: 'Your affair has become obscure for us, O Muḥammad, for we do not know whether you have been given a little 'time' or a lot.'

Then they left him. But Abū Yāsir said to his brother, Ḥuyayy b. Akḥṭab, and to the rabbis who were with him: 'What do you know? Perhaps all of these 'numbers' are summed up in the case of Muḥammad: 71, 161, 231, and 271. That makes 734.' They said: 'His affair still appears ambiguous to us.'

It is claimed that these verses were revealed about them: «It is He Who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambiguous.» (3: 7) [246]

They said that this Tradition explicitly affirms the soundness of their interpretation in this regard and the erroneousness of the opinion of their opponents.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: According to me, the proper interpretation of those openings of the suras which are letters of the alphabet is that God, exalted is His praise, made them discrete letters and did not join them together . . . , because He wished their pronunciation to signify many meanings, not 'just' one meaning, for each one of them. 'This is' just what al-Rabī' b. Anas said, although al-Rabī' confined himself to three meanings, without adding any more.

The correct interpretation of them, according to me, is that every one of these letters comprises what al-Rabī' said, and also what the rest of the exegetes have said, except the opinion of that Arabic expert I mentioned who said that the interpretation is that they are 'just' letters of the alphabet 'with no meaning, like ABC'. . . . For this latter is a pernicious error, because it is foreign to what all the Companions, the Followers, and the experts in exegesis and interpretation who followed in their footsteps have said.

OBJECTION: How can a single letter comprise the signification of many different meanings?

REPLY: In the same way as a single word can 'equivocally' comprise many different meanings. *Umma* is used for 'community of people', for 'period of time', for 'man who is pious and obeys God', and for 'religion' and 'religious community';⁶ *ḍīn* is used for 'punishment' and 'legal retaliation (*qīṣās*)', for 'authority' and 'obedience', for 'submissiveness', for 'reckoning'. And there are many more 'homonyms' like these. . . . Similarly, God said «*alif—lām—mīm*», «*alif—lām—rā*», «*alif—lām—mīm—ṣād*», and the other letters of the alphabet which open the beginnings of the suras, and each letter signifies a variety of meanings, all of them comprising the Names of God and His attributes which the exegetes have mentioned in what we have related from them.

§ Ṭabarī shows how this interpretation of the opening letters is compatible with the remaining interpretations which he mentioned before, except one: that which claimed that the letters had no meaning, but were merely interjections.

¹ 29 suras begin, directly after the *basmala*, with a letter, or group of letters, of the Arabic alphabet, which have been called the *sawāṭiḥ al-suwar* (= openers of the suras). For a list of these suras, and their opening letters, see the table in Watt (1970), pp. 206–10. Not only did these letters give rise to a wide variety of traditional exegetic opinions as to their revelational meanings, as Ṭabarī demonstrates, but they have also excited much commentary by Western scholars, among whom they are known as 'the mysterious letters'. For a discussion of the various opinions, both traditional and modern, see, e.g., the art. *Qur'ān* in *E.I.*^{II}, IV, esp. pp. 412–4.

² According to linguists in the Islamic tradition, words are 'posited' (*maḍū*) for their meanings. That is to say, the meaning has priority over the word, which is posited to convey that meaning, and thus enters the language to represent that meaning whenever it is expressed. There is disagreement about who originally posits words for meanings, but in Ṭabarī's seventh opinion about the opening letters the positer is clearly God. The sense of the Tradition quoted by Ṭabarī would seem to be that certain letters were posited by God to convey meanings, and thus form a kind of symbolic alphabet; however, nothing more than this can be said, because these meanings are not known and have not been explained.

³ This includes the combination of *lām—alif* as a separate letter.

⁴ This is in accordance with the ancient Arabic system of writing numbers with letters of the alphabet, in which the letters are in a different order from the usual. The system is known as *abjad*, from its first four letters, *alif—bā—jīm—dāl*, which correspond to the numbers 1—2—3—4.

⁵ *Ḥurūf min ḥisāb al-jummal*. See the preceding note.

⁶ The word *umma* occurs with the meaning 'period of time' in 11: 8, and with the meaning 'pious man' in 16: 120.

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

dhālika 'l-kitābu lā raiba fī-hi hudan li-'l-muttaqīna

This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing,

THE INTERPRETATION OF *DHĀLIKA 'L-KITĀB*

MOST of the exegetes said that the interpretation of the words of God, the Sublime, «*dhālika 'l-kitāb*» is: This 'is the' Book.

⇒ Mujāhid:

«*Dhālika 'l-kitāb*». It means: It 'is this' Book. [247]

⇒ 'Ikrima:

'It means: This 'is the' Book. [248. Also ⇒ Al-Suddī, 249; ⇒ Ibn Juraij and Ibn 'Abbās, 250]

OBJECTION: How can *dhālik* (=that) have the meaning of *hādhā* (=this)? There can be no question that *hādhā* indicates something present which can be seen, and that *dhālik* indicates something absent, not present and not visible.

REPLY: This is possible because whatever has just been mentioned and is then referred to 'again' is like something present to the person addressed, even though it may mean something which is not present. . . . It is thus with *dhālik* in «*dhālika 'l-kitāb*», because He, exalted is His remembrance, preceded «*dhālika 'l-kitāb*» with «*alif—lām—mīm*»—whose freedom in its various aspects to take on the kind of meanings we described has been mentioned—and then He said to His prophet: 'O Muḥammad, this, which I have mentioned and made clear to you, is the Book.' Therefore, it was proper to put *dhālik* in place of *hādhā*, because it indicates a reference to the meanings included in His saying «*alif—lām—mīm*», just after the reference to it has occurred in 'His saying' «*alif—lām—mīm*». Since reference to it has just been made, it becomes like something present to the one it was pointed out to, so He referred to it by *dhālik* because of its having just 'been mentioned'. . . .

It is 'also' possible that His words «This is the Book» mean the suras which He sent down before the sura of the Cow in both Mecca and Medina. It is as if He were saying to His Prophet: 'O Muḥammad, whatever is contained in the suras of the Book which I have sent down to you is the Book in which there is no doubt.' Then the exegetes interpret it, giving *dhālika* the meaning 'This is the Book', since these suras which were sent down before the sura of the Cow form a part of this whole Book of ours which God sent down to His prophet, Muḥammad.

The first interpretation is the preferable one according to what the exegetes say, because, of all the things they say about *dhālika*, this is the most obvious.

§ Ṭabarī then mentions a view about «*dhālika*» being indirectly used with the meaning of *hādhā* based on a poetic quotation. Some exegetes have also said that «*dhālika*» means the Torah and Evangel. Ṭabarī comments that this interpretation avoids the problem of the meaning of *dhālika*, because it would then genuinely be referring to something absent.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *LĀ RAIBA FĪ-HI*

¶ About which there is no doubt. [⇒ Mujāhid, 251; ⇒ 'Aṭā', 252; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 253; ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, and ⇒ A group of Companions, 254; ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 255 and 256; ⇒ Qatāda, 257; ⇒ al-Rabī' b. Anas, 258]†

. . . 'Which' refers to 'the Book', and it means: There is no doubt about this Book, that it is from God, a guidance for the God-fearing.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *HUDAN*

⇒ Al-Sha'bī:

«*Hudan*» means: Guidance from going astray. [259]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«*Hudan li-'l-muttaqīn*» means: A light for the God-fearing. [260]

Hudā, in this context, is a verbal noun derived from the expression 'I guided (*hadaitu*) so-and-so along the way', when one showed it to him, pointed it out to him, made it clear to him.

OBJECTION: Is the Book of God, then, a light only for the God-fearing? Is it right guidance only for the believers?

REPLY: It is as our Lord has described it. If it had been a light for other than the God-fearing, right guidance for other than the believers, God would not have singled the God-fearing out for 'receiving' guidance. Instead, He would have included in it all those who had been warned.¹ However, it is a guidance for the God-fearing, a remedy for what 'troubles' the breasts of the believers, 'but' a hollow ring in the ears of the deniers and a blinder of the vision of the repudiators; it is God's effective proof against the unbelievers. The believer is guided by it, and the unbeliever confuted.

[L]: «HUDAN»: ² FIRST OPINION: It is in the accusative because it is separated from 'Book', for it is indefinite while 'Book' is definite 'i.e., it is not an adjective attached to 'Book', but is a 'state' (*ḥāl*) referring to «*dhālika 'l-kitāb*»^{1,3}. In this case, the interpretation is: «*Alif-lām-mīm*» is this Book, 'being' a guidance for the God-fearing. . . .

SECOND OPINION: It is in the accusative due to its being separated from the pronomial reference to 'Book' in 'about which', giving the meaning: *Alif-lām-mīm*, about which there is no doubt, 'being' a guidance.

THIRD OPINION: It could also be in the accusative for both these reasons, i.e., on the basis of its 'grammatical' separation both from the 'which' in 'in which' and from 'Book', and 'on the basis of' «*alif-lām-mīm*» forming a complete locution on its own, as in the meaning given by Ibn 'Abbās: I, God, most knowing. 'This is the Book' is then a new sentence. . . .

FOURTH OPINION: If «*hudan*» is taken to be in the nominative, 'This is the Book' must open a new sentence, and «*alif-lām-mīm*» must be a complete locution standing on its own; unless it were nominative through 'having' a laudatory meaning, i.e., 'O guidance . . .'^{1,4}

Now there could be three reasons for «*hudan*»'s being in the nominative. One is the one we have just mentioned. . . . Another is that 'the sentence means: 'This book is a guidance'. . . . And the third is that 'it means 'This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance'. . . ., and is like «This is a Book We have sent down, blessed» (6: 92).

§ Ṭabarī does not decide between these different readings of the case ending of «*hudan*». He ends the section by giving four opinions from an early Kūfan grammarian,⁵ two for the nominative reading and two for the accusative. These are reasons which correspond to the ones he has already given, but he

dismisses them in this case because of internal inconsistencies in the grammarian's arguments.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LI-'L-MUTTAQĪNA

⇒ Al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī:

'The God-fearing' fear what they have been forbidden, and fulfil what has been imposed on them. [261]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'The God-fearing:' Those who are on their guard against God's punishment lest they abandon what guidance (*hudan*) they are aware of, and who hope for His mercy for affirming the truth of what He has brought. [262]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They are the believers. [263]

⇒ Abū Bakr b. 'Aiyāsh:

Al-A'mash asked me about «the God-fearing». I answered him. Then he said to me: 'Ask al-Kalbī about it.' So I asked him, and he said: 'Those who keep away from the major sins.' I came back to al-A'mash, and he said: 'We are of the opinion that it is like this.' And He did not deny it. [264]

⇒ Qatāda:

'The God-fearing:' Those whom 'God' has characterized and described, and then has confirmed their qualities, saying: «'Those' who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend of what We have provided them» (2: 2). [265]

(. . .)

The best interpretation of God's words «a guidance for the God-fearing» is that of those who characterize these people as being those who fear God with respect to the perpetration of what He has forbidden them to do and thus keep away from acts of disobedience to Him, and 'who' fear him in those duties He has commanded them to 'perform' and thus obey Him in performing them. For God has attributed fear of God (*taqwā*) to them, without limiting their fear of Him to some things which He deserves 'to be feared in' and not others. Thus no one can restrict the meaning of this 'term' by describing them

as fearing God in one thing and not another unless 'he gives' a proof which absolutely demands acceptance. For God would not have failed to clarify for His servants such a characteristic of these people—if *taqwā* were limited to a special, rather than a general, meaning—either in His Book or from the tongue of His Messenger.

(...)

¹ The warned are those to whom a Messenger has been sent with a scripture which warns of the consequences of not obeying God.

² Because *hudan* is a noun formed from a root whose final consonant is a *yā*, it has only one case ending and there is thus an ambiguity about whether it is in the nominative or not.

³ For this grammatical construction see *Trans. Intro.*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁴ Ṭabarī refers to an alternative reading of 31: 3 («*hudan wa-rahmatun*»—both in the nominative—«*li-'l-muhsinīn*») where *hudan* becomes an expression praising *āyāt* (=signs) in the preceding verse. Sura 31 is another which begins with «*alif—lām—mīm*», and this alternative reading gives: «*Alif—lām—mīm*; these are the signs of the wise Book—O guidance and mercy for the good-doers—». ...

⁵ Al-Farrā' (1955), I, 10-12 (Sh. & Sh., I, 232, n. 3).

2: 3

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ
يُنْفِقُونَ

*alladhīna yu'minūna bi-'l-ghaibi wa-yuqīmūna 'l-ṣalāta wa-mim-mā
razaqnā-hum yunfiqūna*

who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and expend
of that with which We have provided them;

THE INTERPRETATION OF ALLADHĪNA YUMINŪNA

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«(Those) who believe»: Those who¹ attest to 'its'¹ truth. [267 and 268]

⇒ Al-Rabī':

«(Those) who believe»: Those who fear. [269]

⇒ Al-Zuhri:

Belief is action. [270]

⇒ Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd¹:

Belief is attesting to the truth. [271]

Belief (*īmān*) for the Arabs is attesting to the truth (*taṣdīq*) 'of something': someone who verbally attests to the truth of something is called a believer in it, and someone who attests to the truth of what he says by what he does is called a believer. Hence the words of God 'in which Jacob's sons fabricate the story of Joseph's disappearance before their father': «'You would never believe us, even if we spoke the truth.'», i.e., you would never attest to the truth of what we said. Fear of God may also come into the meaning of 'belief'. . . . 'Belief' is a word which combines the acknowledgement of God, His Book, and His Messenger, with the attestation of this acknowledgement by action. Since this is the case, the best interpretation of this verse, the closest resemblance to the attribute of these people, is that they are characterized by their attestation of the Unseen through word, faith, and deed, for God has not restricted 'the description of' them to one meaning of belief rather than another, but has made their description by 'this term' general, without specifying one of its meanings extracted from their description through either a report or some 'evidence of the' intellect.

THE INTERPRETATION OF BI-'L-GHAIB

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«In the Unseen»: In what comes from Him, i.e., from God, exalted be His praise. [272]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

The Unseen is what is concealed from the servants of the affair of the Garden and the affair of the Fire, and what God has mentioned in the Qur'ān. They—i.e., the believers among the Arabs—did not attest to its truth on the basis of any scripture 'apart from the Qur'ān' or of any 'other' knowledge they had. [273]

⇒ Zirr:

'The Unseen is' the Qur'ān. [274]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

They believe in God, His angels, His Messengers, and the Last Day, in His Garden and His Fire, and in the Meeting (*liqā'*) with

Him. They believe in the life after death. All of this is the Unseen.
[276]

The basic meaning of *ghaib* is everything which is concealed from one. . . .

The interpreters differed concerning the identity of the people about whom God revealed these two verses¹, 2: 2 and 3,¹ at the beginning of this sura; ¹they also differed¹ concerning the qualities and attributes by which He described them—their belief in the Unseen, and the other meanings of their attributes besides this, which these two verses include.

[T]: FIRST OPINION: ¹The believers in the Unseen¹ are specifically the Arabs who believed, and not any other believers from among the people of scripture (*ahl al-kitāb*). They argued the correctness of what they said and the truth of their interpretation from the verse ¹2: 3¹ which follows these two verses, i.e., the words of God: «and who believe in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you». They said that the Arabs had no scripture whose truth they professed, which they acknowledged, and according to which they acted, before the Book which God sent down to Muḥammad. Scripture then belonged only to the people of the two scriptures¹, i.e., the Jews and the Christians¹, not ¹the Arabs¹. ¹The proponents of this view¹ said that, since God gave tidings of those who believe in what was sent down to Muḥammad and in what was sent down before that, after specifically referring to the believers in the Unseen, they knew that each group differs from the other, and that the believers in the Unseen are a kind other than those who attested to the truth of the two scriptures, one of which was sent down to Muḥammad, and the other of which ¹was sent down¹ to those before the Messenger of God.

So they said that, since this is the case, their interpretation is correct, that «¹those¹ who believe in the Unseen» are only those who believe in what was ¹previously¹ concealed from them about the Garden and the Fire, about Reward and Punishment and the Awakening ¹of the dead¹, about attesting to the reality of God, His angels, His Books, and His Messengers, and all that which God has enjoined adherence to on His servants which the Arabs did not profess in their time of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*)¹; ¹it is these who are «the believers in the Unseen»¹ and no one else.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of the Companions:

«¹Those¹ who believe in the Unseen» are those Arabs who believe

«and perform the prayer and expend of that with which We have provided them». The Unseen is what was concealed from the Arabs about the Garden and the Fire and what God mentions in the Qur'ān. They did not attest to the truth of this on the basis of a Book ¹other than the Qur'ān¹ or of any ¹other¹ knowledge which they had. «And who believe in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you», these are the believers among the people of scripture. [277]

SECOND OPINION: Some said rather that these four verses¹, 2: 2–5,¹ were sent down specifically concerning the believers of the people of scripture, because of their belief in the Qur'ān when God informed them in it about the concealed things which they had hidden among themselves and kept secret. When God disclosed this to His prophet in His Revelation, they knew that it was from God, so they believed in the Prophet and attested to the truth of the Qur'ān and the information in it about ¹all¹ the ¹other¹ concealed things which they did not know. . . .

THIRD OPINION: Some said rather that the four verses from the beginning of this sura were sent down to Muḥammad as a description of all believers whose description this is, Arabs and non-Arabs (*'ajam*), people of the two scriptures, and others. This is a description of just a single category of people: the believers in what God sent down to Muḥammad and in what was sent down before him are the believers in the Unseen. They said that God attributed to them belief in what was sent down to Muḥammad and what was sent down before him after attributing to them belief in the Unseen because . . . ¹the information¹ that they believed in the Fire, the Garden, the Awakening, and the other things which God has commanded belief in which are invisible or which are to come and have not yet come, was a meaning which did not include the information that they believed in what Muḥammad and the Messengers and Books before him had brought. They said that, since the meaning of His words «and who believe in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you» is not contained in His words «who believe in the Unseen», the servants needed to know their characteristic according to the former ¹description¹ in order to know them, just as they needed to know them according to the ¹latter¹ description . . . in order to know what actions of His servants pleased Him and what qualities He loved. It was through this—if their Lord granted them success in it—that they would become believers.

⇒Mujāhid:

Four verses of the sura of the Cow are concerned with a description of the believers. Two verses are concerned with a description of the unbelievers. And thirteen verses are concerned with the hypocrites.² [278, 279, and 280]

⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

Four verses from the opening of this sura—i.e., the sura of the Cow—are about those who believe, and two verses are about the chiefs of the factions (*qādat al-aḥzāb*).³ [281]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: In my view, the opinion most likely to be correct, and the most suitable for the interpretation of the Book, is the first, viz., that those whom God described as believing in the Unseen . . . are not those whom He described as believing in what was sent down to Muḥammad and what was sent down to the Messengers before him, for the reasons I have mentioned before¹, which were drawn¹ from those who held this opinion.

‘A further reason’ . . . is that, after describing the believers by the two characteristics He used, and after dividing them in the same way as the unbelievers are ‘subsequently’ divided, He distinguished two kinds ‘of unbelievers’. One ‘kind’ He gave an imprint on their hearts, with a seal on them, with no hope of repentance; and the other ‘He described as’ hypocritical, appearing on the outside to show belief, but hiding hypocrisy within. Thus the unbelievers come to be of two kinds, as did the believers at the beginning of the sura. He gave His servants a description of each category and its characteristic, and of the rewards and punishments He has prepared for each group, and reproached the blameworthy among them and praised the efforts of the obedient among them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YUQĪMŪNA

Performing (*iqāma*, lit. =establishing, setting up) ‘the prayer means’ accomplishing it as it was prescribed for them, with its exact definitions (*ḥadd*, pl. *ḥudūd*), precepts (*farḍ*, pl. *furūd*) [⇒Ibn ‘Abbās, 282], and what is obligatory (*wājib*) in it. . . .[†]

⇒Ibn ‘Abbās:

The performance of the prayer is all the inclinations (*rukū'*),

prostrations (*sujūd*), recitations (*tilāwa*), the total submission (*khushū'*), and giving of one’s attention (*iqbāl*), to it.⁴ [283]

THE INTERPRETATION OF AL-ṢALĀT

⇒Al-Dhaḥḥāk:

‘*Al-ṣalāt*’¹ means the prescribed prayer. [284]

In the speech of the Arabs, *ṣalāt* means a call (*du‘ā'*, =to call on, to supplicate).[†] The prescribed prayer is, in my opinion, called the *ṣalāt* because the one who prays directs his attention to seeking success in his desire for God’s reward through his actions, as well as ‘success’ in his asking his Lord for his needs, just as one who supplicates directs his attention, through his supplication to his lord, to seeking success for his needs and requests.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MIM-MĀ RAZAQNĀ-HUM YUNFIQŪNA

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn ‘Abbās:

‘This means:’ They give *zakāt*, thereby seeking the reward of the hereafter. [285]

⇒Ibn ‘Abbās:

‘This means:’ The *zakāt* on their possessions.⁵ [286]

⇒Al-Daḥḥāk:

Expenditures (*nafaqa*) were pious deeds by which people drew near to God according to their prosperity and effort. Then the obligations of charitable gifts (*sadaqāt*) were revealed ‘in’ seven verses in the sura of Acquittal (9) in which charitable gifts are mentioned. These are the abrogating but unabrogated ‘verses’. [287]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Ibn ‘Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas‘ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions:

‘*Nafaqa*’ is a man’s expenditure on his family (*ahl*). This ‘was what it meant’ before the ‘obligations of’ *zakāt* were revealed. [288]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The best interpretation of the verse, the most appropriate to the description of these people, is that they disbursed all that they had to from their possessions, whether it was *zakāt* or necessary expenditure for any relatives, dependants, or others, for whom they were obliged to lay out expenditure for drawing near 'to God', for 'securing' property, or whatever. This is because God generalized His description of them when He described them as expending what He has provided for them, and extolled them for this quality of theirs. Since He did not particularize praise of them or description of them by 'referring to' one kind of praiseworthy expenditure to the exclusion of some other kind, either by direct communication or otherwise, it is clear that they were described with all the meanings of praiseworthy expenditure of the good things—goods and property—which their Lord provided for them, that is, what He made lawful with which nothing unlawful has been mixed.

¹ See above, *Intro.*, n. 24.

² These are, respectively, 2: 2-5, 2: 6-7, 2: 8-20.

³ The chiefs of the factions (*qādat al-aḥzāb*) were the chiefs of those groups who fought, or were prepared to fight, against Muḥammad. More specifically, they were the chiefs of the Meccan tribes who fought against, and were defeated by, Muḥammad at the battle of Badr (see *Exeg.* 2: 6, n. 3).

⁴ The ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) should be distinguished from the *du'ā'*, which more properly corresponds to the Christian idea of a prayer, being a supplication to God without any of the necessary ritual movements and recitations which make up the *ṣalāt*. A Muslim is ordinarily required to perform the ritual prayer five times a day, and each of these *ṣalāts* is made up of a certain number of *raka's* (two in the morning prayer, four at noon and in the afternoon, three at sunset, and four in the early evening, although the four-*raka'* prayers may be halved by persons travelling or in danger) which each comprise a number of necessary components—there are also components which are not obligatory but are recommended—; over and above the *raka's* there are certain ritual movements and recitations after the second *raka'*, and others with which the prayer must begin and end. As in most ritual worship in Islam, there are also certain prerequisites—in this case such matters as ritual purity, proper clothing, correct location—without the fulfilment of which the prayer becomes invalid. The Traditions cited here, and Ṭabarī's exegesis, point out that the proper execution of the ritual prayer requires the performance of all the necessary constituents and prerequisites, as well as the worshipper's being in the correct state of mind. The word *ṣalāt* is also used for other ritual prayers, notably the supererogatory prayers at night and before and after the main ritual prayers, as well as the Friday congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jum'ā*), the prayer for rain, the prayer in the event of an eclipse, an earthquake, or any other fear-inducing natural phenomenon, and the prayer for the dead.

⁵ *Zakāt* is a tax on certain kinds of property: field crops, fruit, certain domestic animals, gold and silver, and merchandise. The amount payable depends on the kind of property, and, in the first two cases, on whether the land is artificially irrigated or not. It is distributed to certain categories of persons, for which see 9: 60.

2: 4

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ
وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

*wa-'lladhīna yu'minūna bi-mā unzila ilay-ka wa-mā unzila min
qabli-ka wa bi-'l-ākhirati hum yūqinūna*

and who believe in what has been sent down to you and what
was sent down before you, and are certain of the Last 'Abode';

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'LLADHĪNA YU'MINŪNA
BI-MĀ UNZILA ILAY-KA WA-MĀ UNZILA MIN QABLI-KA

AN explanation of those described here, and of what sort of people they are, has been given. We shall mention, however, what has been narrated from those from whom a statement about its interpretation has been narrated.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'It means: Those who¹ affirm your veracity in what you brought from God and what the Messengers who were sent before you brought, without making a distinction between them, or rejecting 'anything of' what they brought them. [289]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They are the believers from among the people of scripture. [290]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-BI-'L-ĀKHIRATI
HUM YŪQINŪNA

Ākhira (= last) is an attribute of the Abode (*dār*), as God says: «Surely the Last Abode (*al-dār al-ākhirah*) is Life, but they do not know.» (29: 64) . . . 'It is called¹ *ākhirah* because it is preceded by the first (*ūlā*) 'abode' which is before it. . . . It may also have been called *ākhirah* because of its deferment (*ta'akhkhur*) after creation, just as this world is called *dunyā* because of its proximity (*dunūw*) to creation.

As for the certainty with respect to the Hereafter which God ascribes to those who believe in what He sent down to His prophet

Muḥammad and to the Messengers before him, it means their certainty concerning that which the polytheists denied, the Awakening, the Resurrection (*nushūr*), Reward and Punishment, the Reckoning (*hisāb*) and the Balance (*mīzān*), and the other things which God has prepared for His creatures on the Day of the Resurrection (*yaum al-qiyāma*).

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

That is to say 'they are certain' of the Awakening and the Resurrection, the Garden and the Fire, the Reckoning and the Balance, i.e., 'they are' not those who claim to believe in what had come before you, but reject what has come to you from your Lord. [291]

This interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās makes it clear that, although the verses at the beginning of the sura describe the believers, the sura, from its beginning, 'actually' alludes to a condemnation by God of the unbelievers among the people of scripture, those who claimed to attest the truth of what the Messengers of God who were before Muḥammad had brought, but who gave Muḥammad the lie, disavowed what he brought, and maintained, despite their disavowal, that they were the rightly guided; 'they claimed' that only Jews and Christians would enter the Garden. . . . In 'the next verse,' «those are upon the guidance from their Lord, those are the ones who prosper», God confirms the matter of the believers among the Arabs and the people of scripture who affirm the truth of Muḥammad and what was sent down to him and the Messengers before him, and informs 'us' that they, exclusively, are the people of right guidance and prosperity and no one else, and that the others are the people of error and loss.

2: 5

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

ulā'ika 'alā hudan min rabbi-him wa-ulā'ika humu 'l-muflīḥūna

there are under guidance from their Lord, these are the ones who prosper.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *ULĀ'IKA 'ALĀ HUDAN*
MIN RABBI-HIM

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some said that He meant the people with the preceding two attributes, i.e., the believers in the Unseen, and the believers in what had been sent down to Muḥammad and to the Messengers before him. Together, they were described as being under guidance from Him, and as those who will prosper.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«'Those' who believe in the Unseen» are the believers among the Arabs. «'Those' who believe in what has been sent down to you» are the believers among the people of scripture. Then He combined the two groups and said: «these are under guidance from their Lord, these are the ones who prosper.» [292]

SECOND OPINION: And some said rather that He meant the God-fearing who believe in the Unseen. They are the ones who believe in what was sent down to Muḥammad and in what had been sent down to the Messengers before him.

THIRD OPINION: Others said rather that He meant those who believe in what was sent down to Muḥammad and in what had been sent down to those before him. These are the believers among the people of scripture who attested to the veracity of Muḥammad and what he brought, and had previously been believers in the other prophets and Books.

(...)

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: In our view, the best interpretation is that reported from Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās, and that «those» refers to

both groups. . . . We are of the opinion that this is the best interpretation because God described the two groups as praiseworthy, then He praised them 'again', and He would not have praised one of the two groups exclusively, since they were equal in their attributes which deserved praise. Similarly, it is not admissible, in His justice, that they be equal as far as the reward they deserved for their actions was concerned, and that He reward one of them exclusively and not the other, and deprive the other of the reward for their actions. The same applies to the course of praising 'them' for 'actions', for praise is one part of the reward.

¶: «'T'hose are under guidance from their Lord»: They 'proceed' according to a light from their Lord, a proof, with rectitude and correctness, and with God directing them and granting them success.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'«Those» who «are under guidance from their Lord» proceed' according to a light from their Lord and go straight forward according to what came to them. [293]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ULĀ'IKĀ HUMU 'L-MUFLIḤŪNA

¶ Those are the ones who are granted success, who attain what gain and reward they seek from God through their actions and their belief in God, His Books, and His Messengers, who achieve eternal life in the Gardens, and deliverance from the punishment which God has prepared for His enemies.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'Those are the ones who prosper» means those who attain what they seek and are delivered from the evil from which they flee. [294]

§ Ṭabarī gives evidence from poetry for the interpretation of prosperity as attaining what is sought and having one's needs satisfied.

2: 6

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

inna 'lladhīna kafarū sawā'un 'alay-him a'andharta-hum am lam tundhir-hum lā yu'minūna

As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether you have warned them or have not warned them, they do not believe.

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'As for the unbelievers», i.e., 'those who did not believe' in what was sent down to you from your Lord, although they said: 'We believe in what has come to us before you.' [295]

Ibn 'Abbās was of the opinion that this verse was sent down concerning the Jews who were in the environs of Medina at the time of the Messenger of God. It rebukes them for their disavowal of the prophethood of Muḥammad and their accusation of lying against him, while they knew him and had knowledge that he was the Messenger of God to them and to all people.

⇒ 'Ikrima, or ⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair:

Ibn 'Abbās said: 'There are up to a hundred 'verses' at the beginning of the sura of the Cow which were sent down concerning men who were Jewish rabbis, and hypocrites from 'the tribes' of Aus and Khazraj . . . ' [296]

'Ibn 'Abbās' named 'them' by personal name and lineage. We do not wish to prolong the book by 'mentioning all' their names.¹

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Messenger of God desired that all people should believe and follow the guidance, but God informed him that only those for whom God had previously determined felicity in the first mention

would believe, and only those for whom God had previously determined misery 'in the Hereafter' in the first mention would go astray. [297]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas¹, ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya²:

'These' two verses are about the chiefs of the factions. . . . They are those whom God mentions in this verse: «Have you not seen those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness, and caused their people to dwell in the abode of ruin?—Gehenna, wherein they are roasted; an evil establishment!» (14: 28 and 29). They were the ones who were killed on the day of 'the battle of' Badr.³ [298]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The best of these interpretations is the 'first' one of Ibn 'Abbās [295], although each of the opinions of those we have mentioned has a proper explanation.

The explanation of those who interpret according to al-Rabī' b. Anas's opinion is that since God said about a group of the unbelievers that they will not believe, and that the warning will be of no use to them, and since there were 'other' unbelievers whom God helped through the Prophet's warning to them because they believed in God and the Prophet and what he brought from God after the revelation of this sura, the verse can only have been sent down concerning a particular 'group' of unbelievers. Since, moreover, there is no doubt that God did not help the chiefs of the factions through the Prophet's warning to them up until He killed them at the hands of the believers on the day of Badr, it is quite clear that it is these people to whom God refers by this verse.

However, the reason we chose the interpretation we did . . . is that 'this verse' . . . follows God's speaking about the believers among the people of scripture, their description and characteristic's¹, and His extolling them for their believing in Him, and His Books and Messengers. It is most appropriate, then, to the Wisdom of God, that there should follow information about the unbelievers among them and their characteristics, disparagement of their behaviour and their conditions, public vilification of them, and dissociation from them. For the believers and polytheists among them, although their situations differed according to their religious beliefs, were all of the same kind, since they were 'all from' the Children of Israel.⁴

So, at the beginning of this sura, God remonstrated to His Prophet against those rabbis (*ḥabr*, pl. *aḥbar*) of the Children of Israel who were polytheist Jews, and who, despite their knowledge of his prophethood, denied it, by disclosing to His Prophet what their rabbis had kept hidden and secret from 'the ordinary Jews' so that most of them did not know it although their rabbis did, in order that they should understand that He who had given 'the Prophet' knowledge of it was precisely He who had sent down the Book to Moses. For this was something which neither Muḥammad, nor his people, nor his kinsfolk, knew about, and which they were not aware of, before the Furqān was sent down to him; so 'the rabbis' could claim to be confused about him, about whether he was a prophet, and whether what he brought was from God 'or not'. But how could they claim confusion about the truthfulness of an illiterate (*ummi*)⁵ raised among illiterates, who could neither write, nor read, nor calculate? For it is said that if you can read books then you have knowledge, and if you can calculate then you can foretell the future from the stars. Yet 'the Prophet' was sent to the rabbis, who could read and write—for they had studied books and were in charge of the communities—to inform them about their hidden faults, about their carefully guarded knowledge, about their secret traditions, and about the things which they concealed which 'even' the rabbis below them did not know. Surely it is not difficult to decide about someone like that, surely his truthfulness is altogether clear.

(...)

Now the meaning of *kufṛ* (=unbelief) in «As for the unbelievers» is 'repudiation': that is to say the rabbis among the Jews of Medina repudiated the prophethood of Muḥammad and concealed it from the people, keeping it secret, although «they recognized it as they recognize their 'own' sons.» (6: 20) The original meaning of *kufṛ* among the Arabs is 'to conceal' something. Thus the night is called a 'concealer' because its darkness conceals what it envelops.† Likewise, the Jewish rabbis concealed the affair of Muḥammad . . . from the people, although they knew about his prophethood and had discovered his description in their Books. 'Those about whom God sent down this verse are those' about whom God said: «Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after We have shown them clearly in the Scripture—they shall be cursed by God and the cursers» (2: 159). . . .

(...)

¶ O Muḥammad, as regards those Jewish rabbis of Medina who repudiated your prophethood after having knowledge of it, who concealed from the people the explanation of your affair, i.e., that you were My Messenger to My creatures, although I had taken a pledge and an agreement from them that they would not conceal it, that they would explain it to the people and inform them that they had found a description of you in their Books, it is all the same whether you have warned them or not, for they will not believe and will not return to the truth, nor will they attest to your veracity or to the truth of what you have brought them.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Alike it is to them whether you have warned them or have not warned them, they do not believe.» This refers to those who deny (*kafarū*) the reminder (*dhikr*) of which they have knowledge, and repudiate the agreement in your favour which was taken from them. They deny what came to you as well as what they know which others apart from you brought them. How could they heed a warning or a caution from you when they deny the knowledge of you which they have? [299, a continuation of 295]

¹ Aus and Khazraj were the two principal tribes of Medina, at the time of the Prophet's migration there, to become his followers; they thus formed the majority of the Anṣār (see *Intro.*, n. 35). Before Muḥammad's migration, the town was called Yathrib, but it subsequently became known as Madīnat al-Rasūl (=the City of the Messenger), or simply Madīna; Tabarī also sometimes refers to it as the Prophet's 'abode of emigration'. *Munāfiqūn* (=hypocrites) is the term used in the Qur'ān to refer to those Medinese who proved unreliable to the Prophet in military ventures and political life although they outwardly professed Islam. It later came to be used as a general epithet for all those whose faith was suspect. For this term see *Exeg.* 2: 8, pp. 114-1 and [319]. Ibn Ishāq (1955) gives lists of the Jewish adversaries of the Prophet (pp. 239-40), of the hypocrites of the Aus and Khazraj (pp. 232-6), and of the Rabbis who accepted Islam hypocritically (pp. 246-7); he goes on to discuss the references to the hypocrites and the Jews in the second sura and elsewhere (pp. 247-70).

² See Sh. & Sh., I, 252, n. 2.

³ Badr, or Badr Ḥunain, lies where the road from Medina crosses the old caravan route from Mecca to Syria. It is the site of the first major confrontation between Muḥammad and the Meccan forces allied against him in Ramaḍān 17/ March 624. Seventy of the Meccans, who were all from the Quraish tribe, were killed, including twelve of their clan leaders (chiefs of factions), notably Abū Jahl, the leader of the force, and another seventy were taken prisoner, as against a total loss of fifteen lives among the Muslims.

⁴ For the 'Children of Israel', see *Exeg.* 2: 40, p. 269.

⁵ For the interpretation of *ummi*, see *Exeg.* 2: 78, p. 410.

2:7

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَرِهِمْ
غَشْوَةً وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

*khatama 'llāhu 'alā qulūbi-him wa-'alā sam'i-him wa-'alā abṣāri-him
ghishāwatun wa-la-hum 'adhābun 'aẓīmun*

God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering, and theirs is a mighty chastisement.

THE INTERPRETATION OF KHATAMA 'LLĀHU

'ALĀ QULŪBI-HIM WA-'ALĀ SAM'I-HIM

THE original meaning of 'the 1st form verb¹ *khatama* (=to seal) is 'to impress' (*ṭab'*), and the *khātim* (=the seal) is the 'signet' which makes the impress (*tābi'*). . .

OBJECTION: How can He put a seal on hearts when 'seal' is an impress 'put' on receptacles, containers, and wrappings?

REPLY: The servants' hearts are receptacles for the knowledge deposited therein, and containers for the understanding of things which is placed therein. The meaning of a seal on them and on the hearing, through which audible things are perceived and by means of which understanding of the truths of spoken communications about hidden (*mughaiyabāt*, =unperceivable) things is attained, is thus similar to the meaning of a seal on any other receptacle or container.

OBJECTION: Are there characteristics of this 'impress' which you can describe to us and which we can comprehend? Is it like the impress which is known perceptually, or is it something else?

REPLY: [T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Al-A'mash:

Mujāhid showed us by 'using' his hand and said: 'Our companions' considered the heart like this'—i.e., the palm 'of the hand'—. 'When the servant commits a sin, a part of it is closed

up'—and he demonstrated by 'curling up' his little finger like this—'and when he commits a sin it is closed up'—and he demonstrated by 'curling up' another finger—'and when he commits a sin it is closed up'—and he demonstrated by 'curling up' another finger like this, until he had curled up all his fingers. He said: 'Then it is impressed with a seal.' (...) 'They 'also' considered this to be the "stain" (*rain* or *rān*, see 83: 14).' [300, see also 301]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

Mujāhid said: 'I was informed that sins surround the heart on 'various' sides until they merge round about it. This merging round it is the impress, and the impress is the seal.'

Ibn Juraij added: The seal is the sealing of the hearts and hearing. [302]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

'Abd Allāh b. Kathīr said he heard Mujāhid say: 'The "stain" is less serious than the "seal" (*ṭab*'), the "seal" less serious than the "locks" (*aqfāl*, see 47: 24): the "locks" are more severe than all of these.' [303]

SECOND OPINION: Some of them said that the meaning of His words «God has set a seal on their hearts» is 'that it is' a message from God about their arrogance, and their aversion to listening to the truth they were summoned to, as when one says that a person is deaf to what someone says when he refuses to listen to it and arrogantly makes up his mind not to understand it.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The truth in this matter, according to me, is what accords with the truth of the report from the Messenger of God:

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'When the believer commits a sin there is a black spot in his heart. If he repents, renounces 'it', and asks forgiveness, this polishes his heart. But if he compounds 'his sin, the point' grows bigger till it locks his heart, and this is the stain (*rān*) which God speaks 'of': «No indeed: but that they earned has stained (*rāna*) their hearts» (83: 14).' [304]

'The Messenger' means that when sins pile up on the heart they lock it, and that when they have locked it a seal from God is set on it, and an

impress. The seal mentioned by God . . . is like the imprint and seal on receptacles and containers which are visible to the eyes, the contents of which cannot be reached unless their 'seal' is broken and they are opened. In the same way belief cannot reach the hearts of those on whose hearts God has set a seal, unless He breaks His seal and opens the band He 'has tied around them'.

To those who hold the second opinion . . ., one asks whether this arrogance and aversion . . . is an act of 'these people' themselves, or whether it is an act of God in them. If they claim that it is an act of their own—and this is what they say—they will be told that God has said that it is He who sets a seal on their hearts and hearing; so how could the unbeliever's aversion to belief, and the arrogance 'which prevents him' from averring it, which is an act of his own according to 'them', be a seal from God on his heart and hearing? The seal on 'the unbeliever's' heart and hearing is an act of God and not the unbeliever's own.

If they claim that this is possible because 'the unbeliever's' arrogance and aversion come from God's seal on his heart and hearing, . . . they are renouncing their doctrine and affirming that the seal from God on the hearts and hearing of the unbelievers has another meaning apart from their unbelief, and apart from their arrogance and aversion to accepting belief and averring it. But this is acceptance of what they denied.

This verse is the clearest evidence of the incorrectness of the opinion of those who deny that God imposes 'on man' (*ṭaklīf*) what can only be done through His help, because God said that He 'himself' sets a seal on the hearts and hearing of a category of unbelievers among his servants. Yet He does not cancel their obligation, nor relieve them of any duties. Nor does He absolve them for anything they did which conflicts with obedience to Him because of a seal He put on their hearts and hearing. Instead, He said that there will be a mighty chastisement for all of them for having abandoned obedience to Him in the limits and duties which He has 'variously' commanded and forbidden them, together with His ordaining judgement against them because they do not believe.

Argument
against the
Mu'tazilites

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'ALĀ ABṢĀRI-HIM GHISHĀWATUN

'God's' words «and on their eyes is a covering» is an independent clause coming after the completion of the clause about those on whom God set 'His' seal, because 'a covering' is in the nominative as 'the predicate'

to 'on their eyes'. . . . In our opinion this is the correct reading for two reasons.

First, the reciters and scholars agree that it is correct, and there is only a single and exceptional deviant opinion. . . . 'The fact that' there is a consensus of argument finding fault with this 'deviant' reading is evidence enough of its incorrectness. Secondly, eyes are nowhere qualified with the seal in the Book of God, or in reports from the Messenger of God; nor does 'an expression of' this 'kind' exist in any of the Arabs' speech. 'Moreover,' in another sura, He has said «and 'He has' set a seal upon his hearing and his heart», and has then said «and laid a covering on his vision» (45: 23), and has not included 'vision' within the 'extent of the' meaning of the seal. . . . A report narrated from Ibn 'Abbās [305] agrees with our opinion and interpretation.

§ The alternative reading to which Ṭabarī refers, and which he rejects, has «*ghishāwatan*» instead of «*ghishāwatun*», i.e., it gives this word an accusative ending. In order to explain this reading, recourse is had to the possibility in Arabic of omitting a verb in a clause when the clause can be clearly understood without it. In this case, the missing verb would be 'put', giving 'and put a covering on their eyes', where this verb is clearly understood from the active sense of *khatama*, 'He set a seal', and so need not be included. Despite the reasonableness of this reading, Ṭabarī rejects it on the grounds of consensus (*ijmā'*), as he says above.

In Arabic, *ghishāwa* means 'covering'.† So God informed His Prophet, Muḥammad, that He had set a seal and an impress on the hearts of those Jewish rabbis who refused to believe in him, so that they could not understand the exhortation He had addressed to them, both in the knowledge He had given them of their scriptures, and in what He had set down in the Book He had revealed and sent down to His Prophet, Muḥammad. 'And He set a seal' on their hearing, so that they could not hear Muḥammad's . . . warning, or reminder, or proof, which he gave them of his prophethood. . . . He also informed him that there was a covering on their eyes 'preventing' them from seeing the path of guidance and from realizing the evil of the errancy and ruin they were pursuing. There are reports from several interpreters in support of what we say about this.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering», i.e., against their ever attaining guidance without the truth which came to you from your Lord which they

deny from you, so that they might believe in it, even though they believe everything which 'came' before you. [307]

(. .)

Others, however, have interpreted 'the reference to' those unbelievers to whom God said that He did this as 'being to' the chiefs of the factions who were killed on the day of Badr.

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

These two verses up to «and theirs is a mighty chastisement» 'are about' «those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness, and caused their people to dwell in the abode of ruin» (14: 28). They were those who were slain on the day of Badr. There were only two men among the chiefs 'of the factions', Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb and al-Ḥakam b. Abi 'l-Ās, who 'eventually' entered Islam. [309, the conclusion of 298]

(. .)

We have previously demonstrated which of these two interpretations is preferable, and we do not wish to repeat 'ourselves here'.¹

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA-HUM 'ADHĀBUN AẒĪMUN

The interpretation of this is, in my view, as Ibn 'Abbās interprets it:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Theirs is a mighty chastisement for their opposition to you 'i.e., Muḥammad'. This concerns the Jewish rabbis, and concerns the truth which came to you from your Lord which they denied after they had knowledge. [311, the conclusion of 295, 299, and 307]

¹ See above, *Exeg.* 2: 6, pp. 105-7.

2: 8

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ
بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

wa-mina 'l-nāsi man yaqūlu āmannā bi-'llāhi wa-bi-'l-yawmi 'l-ākhirī
wa-mā-hum bi-mu'minīna

And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they are not believers.

... *Nās* (= men) ... is a collective 'noun' from which no singular 'can be formed'. Instead, one 'man' is *insān*, and one 'woman' is *insāna*.

(...)

All the interpreters are agreed that this verse was sent down concerning a group of the hypocrites (*ahl al-nifāq*), and that this 'way of acting' was one of their attributes.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'This verse refers to' ... the hypocrites from 'the tribes of' Aus and Khazraj, and those who agreed with them. [312]

The names of these people are given in this Tradition from Ibn 'Abbās quoting Ubaiy b. Ka'b. I shall leave them out, however, not wishing to prolong the book by mentioning them.¹

⇒ Qatāda:

'This verse, and those which follow, up to verse 16' ... concern the hypocrites. [313]

⇒ Mujāhid:

This verse 'and those' up to the thirteenth involve a description of the hypocrites. [314, 315, 316. See also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of the Companions, 317; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 318]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

This is the hypocrite whose words contradict his actions, whose secrets 'belie' what he asserts publicly, whose entrance 'differs

from¹ his exit, whose presence 'is at variance' with his absence.
[319]

The interpretation of this is that when God established His Messenger, Muḥammad, in 'Medina', ... spreading Islam among its inhabitants, and the Muslims forced those inhabitants who were polytheists to give up their worship of idols, and those inhabitants who were people of scripture were humbled, the learned among the Jews of 'the town' displayed malice towards the Messenger of God, and manifested an enmity and hatred towards him out of jealousy and outrage; that is, except for a small group of them whom God guided to Islam and who became Muslims (2: 109). ... But a group from the classes of the Anṣār who sheltered the Messenger and helped him grew stronger in their polytheism and ignorance. ... They supported the 'Jewish rabbis' clandestinely, not in public, fearing to be killed or taken as captives by the Messenger and his Companions, but they relied on the Jews in their polytheism and their thinking ill of Islam. When they met the Messenger and his Companions, who believed in him, they took precautions and would say: 'We are believers in God, in His Messenger, and in the Awakening', ... in order to ward off from themselves the judgement of God on those who believed what they believed. ... But when they met their brothers from the Jews and polytheists and those who denied Muḥammad and what had come to him, they would draw aside with them and «say: 'We are with you; we were only mocking'» (2: 14). It is these whom God meant by «And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they are not believers» ...

By «the Last Day (*al-yaum al-ākhir*)» is meant the Awakening on the Day of the Resurrection. It is called the Last Day because ... there is no other day after it.

OBJECTION: How can there be no day after it, when there is no termination to the Hereafter, no extinguishing and no end?

REPLY: What the Arabs call a day (*yaum*) includes the night-time that precedes it, and if there is no night-time before the daylight period it is not called a day. The Day of the Resurrection is a day after which there is no night, but just the 'preceding' night with whose day-break the Resurrection begins. So this day is the last of days, and God has therefore called it the Last Day (*al-yaum al-ākhir*); and He has 'also' described it as barren ('*aqīm*') (22: 55) because there is no night 'to succeed' it.

The interpretation of «but they are not believers» is that God rejects their 'claim' to the 'attribute' of 'belief', after reporting that they said with their tongues: 'We believe in God and the Last Day.' This is a refutation from God of their claim that they entertained belief (*īmān*) and affirmed the Awakening, and His announcement to His Prophet that what they declared to him with their mouths was at odds with what was in their innermost hearts and contrary to what their souls had resolved.

In this verse is the clearest indication of the falsity of what the Jahmīya claim, viz., that belief (*īmān*) is the 'mere' verbal assertion of the truth, and has no other meaning.² For God says of the hypocrites He mentions in His Book that they announce with their tongues: «'We believe in God and the Last Day'», and then He rejects their claim that they are believers because their faith does not confirm what they say.

(...)

¹ See Exeg. 2: 6, n. 1.

² The Jahmīya were a sect to whom belief in determinism and the createdness of the Qur'ān were ascribed. They took their name from Jahm b. Safwān (d. 746/128). However, Ṭabarī is evidently mistaken in ascribing this doctrine to the Jahmīya. They rather defined *īmān* as mere knowledge in the heart ('*ilm bi-l-qalb*'), and believed that a man could profess Judaism and Christianity with his tongue and in his worship, while at the same time being a Muslim because he had knowledge of God in his heart.

2: 9

يُخٰدِعُونَ اللّٰهَ وَالَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا وَمَا يَخْدَعُوْنَ اِلَّا اَنْفُسَهُمْ
وَمَا يَشْعُرُوْنَ

yukhādi'ūna 'llāha wa-'lladhīna āmanū wa-mā yakhda'ūna illā
anfusa-hum wa-mā yash'urūna

They would deceive God and the believers, but only themselves
do they deceive, and they are unaware.

THE INTERPRETATION OF YUKHĀDI'ŪNA 'LLĀHA
WA-'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ

THE hypocrite's attempted deception (*khidā'*) of his Lord and of the
believers is the verbal attestation of the truth which he declares with his

tongue contrary to the doubt and denial in his heart. By it he seeks to ward off God's judgement of death or captivity which would otherwise necessarily fall on whoever makes a denial as he does.

OBJECTION: How can someone who is hypocritical towards God and the believers be 'called' a deceiver (*mukhādi'*) when he only declares what is contrary to what he believes out of 'fear and' precaution (*taqīya*)?

REPLY: The fact that someone verbally declares something other than what is in his mind out of precaution so as to save himself from what he fears, and the fact that he does thereby actually save himself from it, does not prevent the Arabs calling him a deceiver. . . . Although he attempts to deceive the believers in the present world, he actually deceives himself by this act . . . , for it appears to him that he shall thereby give his soul its desire and shall give it to drink of the cup of happiness, whereas in fact he shall take it to the pools of perdition, and force it to swallow the cup of torment, and lead it face to face with the wrath of God and to His painful punishment, against which he cannot prevail. This is his self-deception: he supposes that he has thereby done good for 'his soul', despite the offence against it in terms of the Resurrection. As He says: «and only themselves do they deceive, and they are unaware», thereby announcing to His believing servants that the hypocrites, in their offences against their souls in calling down their Lord's wrath for their unbelief, doubt, and denial, are unaware; rather they stick to their ways like the blind.

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

I asked 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Zaid 'about this verse'. . . . He said: 'These are the hypocrites. They would deceive God, His Messenger, and those who believed, 'pretending' that they believed in what they professed.' [320]

This verse is one of the clearest proofs of God's refutation of those who claim that God only chastises one who obstinately refuses to believe in Him after he comes to know of His Oneness and after he has been convinced of the correctness of confessing His Oneness and affirming 'the genuineness' of His Books and Messenger, in doing which he stubbornly opposes his Lord. For God has announced that 'these deceiving hypocrites' . . . were unaware that they were mistaken about the falsehood they persisted in, and deluded about the deception they

thought they were perpetrating on their Lord and those who believed in Him. Then¹, in 2: 10,¹ He announces that theirs is a painful chastisement for their refusal to recognize the prophethood of His Prophet and their conviction that they should not believe in Him, and also for their lie in claiming that they were believers when they persisted in their unbelief.

OBJECTION: You know that verbs of the form *fā'ala*¹, i.e., the IIIrd form, like *khāda'a* (= to delude),¹ must have two agents. For example, the Ist form verb *ḍaraba* means 'to hit' someone, while the IIIrd form *ḍāraba* means 'to fight together' with someone; the action is reciprocated¹. . . . Who is it, then, who tries to deceive (*khāda'a*) the hypocrite so that one can say he tries to deceive (*khāda'a*) God and the believers?

REPLY

§ Ṭabarī mentions the opinion of Abū 'Ubaida, without naming him, who, in his book *Majāz al-Qur'ān*,¹ maintained that this particular word had the unaltered, unreciprocal meaning of the Ist form.

My opinion about this, however, is not the same as 'Abū Ubaida's¹, but is that it is 'a form¹ . . . which must have two agents, like the other 'verbs¹ of this 'IIIrd¹ . . . form which are known throughout the Arabic language. Thus, the hypocrite tries to deceive God by lying with his tongue, as we have just explained, and God deceives him by leaving him without a proper understanding about where the salvation of his soul lies when he is eventually resurrected, as He announced by His words: «And let not the unbelievers suppose that the indulgence We grant them is better for them; We grant them indulgence only that they may increase in sin» (3: 178), and in the sense of what He announced that He would do to him in the Hereafter: «Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed: 'Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light!', it shall be said: 'Return you back behind, and seek for a light!' And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward whereof is chastisement.» (57: 13) . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ YAKHDĀ'ŪNA

ILLĀ ANFUSA-HUM

OBJECTION: Did not the hypocrites 'succeed in¹ deceiving the

believers . . . 'so as to distract their attention¹ from their persons, their property, and their offspring, so that their worldly fortunes became safe for them, although they were 'themselves¹ deceived about the matter of the Hereafter?

REPLY: It is a mistake to say that they deceived the believers, because, if we say that, it necessarily implies that they succeeded in really deceiving the believers. . . . But we say that the hypocrites attempted deception on their Lord and the believers, but did not deceive them; rather they deceived themselves, as God said, and no one else. . . . The hypocrites deceived only themselves, because the Muslims did not take possession of any property or kin of theirs, either at the time of their attempted deception of them about it through hypocrisy or before that, so that they could 'really have¹ salvaged it through their deception. They only defended it by lying to them and by declaring with their tongues something which was not 'truly¹ in their minds, and God passed judgement on them concerning their property, their persons, and their offspring, according to the outward aspect of their affairs in terms of the religious community they affiliated with—and God knew the matters which they concealed.

The deceiver can only be someone who 'actually¹ dupes someone about something while the deceived does not know what he is being deceived about. However, when the one against whom deception is attempted is aware of the attempted deception against him, 'the deceiver¹ indubitably deceives merely himself, not the one whom he thought he would deceive. No harm befalls 'the one whom he tried to deceive¹ as a result of his attempted deception; rather he avoids the one who thinks he is deceiving him as a kind of bait so that the proof for the punishment which awaits 'the would-be deceiver¹ may be complete. The one being baited is unaware that the baiter knows the state of his soul, that he sees into his mind, and that the respite given him by the baiter, his refraining from meting out punishment to him for his sin, is so that the would-be deceiver can fully perpetrate his aim, 'and thus¹ merit the punishment of his baiter. . . . It is for this reason that God denies that the hypocrite is deceiving anyone but himself. . . .

§ Ṭabarī notes the alternative reading *wa-mā yukhdā'ūna*—IIIrd form—*illā anfusa-hum*, and refutes it on the basis of the preceding explanation and on the grounds that the hypocrites did truly deceive themselves, while the IIIrd form merely implies an attempt at deception. He also rejects this reading for being internally inconsistent.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MĀ YASH'URŪNA*

«*Wa-mā yash'urūna*» means 'and they did not know.' . . . They did not know that God was deceiving them by letting them run and baiting them, that it was God's way of informing them about the proof 'of their sin' and the pardon 'they could have had' and their way of deceiving themselves which was eventually to their detriment.

⇒Ibn Wāḥb:

I asked 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid 'about' this verse. . . . He said: 'They were unaware that they were harming themselves by concealing their unbelief and hypocrisy.' Then he recited His words «Upon the day when God shall awaken them all together», and said: 'They are the hypocrites'—up to «and think they are on something» (58: 18)—'belief would have been useful for them before you', i.e., the believers'. [321, the continuation of 320]

¹ See Sh. & Sh., I, 274, n. 2.

2: 10

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ

*fī qulūbi-him maraḍun fa-zāda-humu 'llāhu maraḍan wa-la-hum
'adhābun alīmun bi-mā kānū yakdhibūna*

In their hearts is a sickness, and God has added sickness for them, and theirs is a painful chastisement for what lies they have told.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FĪ QULŪBI-HIM MARAḌUN*

MARAḌ basically means a sickness, and it can be said in connection with the body or religion. So God announces that there is a sickness in the hearts of the hypocrites, by which He means a sickness in the conviction in their heart. Since it is understood 'that' a reference to the sickness of the heart means 'that they have' a sickness of their convictions, it suffices to refer to the heart. . . . ‡ Thus the meaning of «In their hearts is a sickness» is that there is a sickness in the conviction in

their hearts concerning religion and attesting the veracity of Muḥammad and what he brought from God. . . . 'This' sickness is their doubt about Muḥammad and what he brought from God . . . , and their confusion about it. They are not certain about it with the certainty of belief, nor do they deny it with the denial of polytheism, but, as God described them, they oscillate in the middle of the two—not to the one and not to the other.¹ . . .

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«There is a sickness in their hearts», that is, doubt. [322. See also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, ⇒A group of Companions, 324; ⇒Qatāda, 326; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 327; ⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid, 328]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

The sickness is hypocrisy. [323]

⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid:

This sickness is in religion, not a sickness in the body. (...) They are the hypocrites. [325]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-ZĀDA-HUMU 'LLĀHU MARAḌAN*

We have shown above that the interpretation of the sickness . . . is doubt in the convictions of their hearts and their religious faith, and in their persistent 'belief' about Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, and his prophethood and that which he brought. The sickness which God added to their sickness was of the same kind as the doubt and confusion in their hearts before the increase [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 329; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 330; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 332; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 333]. God added doubt and confusion to the sickness and doubt that had previously been in their hearts through establishing 'new' restrictions and duties . . . about which they had 'new' doubts and misgivings, 'over and above' those they had about the restrictions and duties which He had previously imposed [⇒Qatāda, 331]. This was in the same way as He added 'more' belief to the belief of those who believed in Him . . . and His duties and restrictions. . . by establishing 'new' restrictions and duties, as He has said in His Revelation: «Whenever a sura is sent down to you, some of them say: 'To which of you has this added belief?' As for the believers, to them it has added belief, and they are joyful. * But as for those in whose heart is

sickness, to them it has added abomination to their abomination, and they have died while they were unbelievers.» (9: 124 and 125)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-HUM 'ADHĀBUN ALĪM*

(...)

⇒ Al-Rabī' 'b. Anas¹:

Ālīm 'means' 'causing pain (*mūji'*)'. [334; ⇒ al-Ḍahḥāk, 335 and 336]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *BI-MĀ KĀNŪ YAKDHIBŪNA*

[R] «*Bi-mā kĀnū yakdhībūna* (=for what lies they have told)» . . . , which is the reading of the majority of the Kūfan reciters; «*yukadhdhibūna* (=for that which they have called lies)», which is the reading of the majority of the reciters of Medina, the Hijaz, and Baṣra.

Those who read this the second way are evidently of the opinion that God ordained a painful chastisement for the hypocrites because of their giving His Prophet and what he brought the lie, and that a lie, in contrast to an accusation of lying, does not require even a light punishment, how much less a painful one.

I do not think the matter is as they say, however. At the very beginning of God's statement about the hypocrites in 'this' sura, He said that they lied by their pretension to, and declaration of, belief, attempting to deceive God, His Messenger, and the believers. He said: «And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they are not believers. * They would deceive God and the believers» by saying this, and by trying to hide their doubt and misgiving, «but only themselves», not the Messenger of God and the believers, «do they deceive» by fabricating this; «and they are unaware» of how they are deceiving themselves, and how God is baiting them and letting them run. «In their hearts» is the doubt and misgiving of hypocrisy, but God added doubt and misgiving for the lies they tell to God, His Messenger, and the believers by their declaration of belief in God and the Last Day. In saying this they lied, because they tried to conceal the doubt and sickness in the convictions in their hearts about God and His Messenger. Now it is most appropriate in God's Wisdom that His Threat to them 'of punishment' should be for the evil of those actions and the blameworthiness of those morals with 'the mention of

which¹ He began to speak of them, and not for any actions of theirs which have not been mentioned, for this is 'the pattern' of the other verses of His Revelation. He begins by mentioning the good qualities of the actions of one group, then seals this with the Promise 'of reward' for these actions with the mention of which he began; then He begins to mention the evil qualities of the acts of others, and then seals this with the Threat for these actions with the mention of which He started.

. . . There is a supplementary proof for the correctness of our opinion, 'further' evidence that the reading must be the one we have chosen, and that our interpretation is the right one, i.e., that God threatens a painful chastisement for the hypocrites for 'their' lie, which combines the two meanings of doubt and accusing 'someone' of lying, in God's words: «When the hypocrites come to you they say: 'We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of God.' And God knows that you are indeed His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are truly liars. * They have taken their oaths as a covering, then they have barred from the way of God. Surely they—evil are the things they have been doing» (63: 1 and 2), and in another verse from 'the sura of' the Disputer: «They have taken their oaths as a covering, and barred from God's way; so theirs is a humbling chastisement.» (58:16) God announced that the hypocrites were lying in what they said to the Messenger of God, when their belief about him was what it was. Then He announced that theirs would be a humbling chastisement for this lying of theirs. If the reading . . . «*yukadhdhibūna* (=for that which they have called lies)» were correct in the sura of the Cow, then the reading in the other sura (63: 1 and 2) would have to be *la-mukadhdhibūna*, i.e., ' . . . and God bears witness that the hypocrites are truly people who accuse of lying', so that the threat against them, which is the consequence of that, would be a threat 'of punishment' for having accused 'the Prophet' of lying, not for having lied 'themselves'. But all Muslims are agreed on the reading «*la-kādhībūna* (=that the hypocrites are truly liars)» . . . , and this is the clearest proof for the reading «*bi-mā kĀnū yakdhībūna* (=for what lies they told)» in the sura of the Cow, and that the threat 'of punishment' . . . for lying is true, not for accusing of lying.

§ Ṭabarī finishes by mentioning a dispute between a Baṣran and a Kūfan grammarian about the function of the particle *mā* in «*bi-mā yakdhībūna*».

¹ See 4: 143.

2: 11

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ
مُصْلِحُونَ

*wa-idhā qīla la-hum lā tufsidū fi 'l-arḍi qālū innamā nahnu
muṣliḥūna*

When it is said to them: 'Do not do corruption in the land', they say: 'We are but the ones who put things right.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDHĀ QĪLA LA-HUM
LĀ TUFSIDŪ FI 'L-ARḌĪ*

[T]: FIRST OPINION: It is reported that Salmān al-Fārisī used to say: 'They have not yet come' [337, 338].

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās; ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd; and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They are the hypocrites. The corruption (*fasād*) in «Do not do corruption in the land» is unbelief and acts of disobedience. [339]

⇒ Al-Rabī' 'b. Anas¹:

«Do not do corruption in the land» means:¹ 'Do not disobey in the land'; . . . this corruption of theirs was disobedience to God, because someone who disobeys God in the land or commands 'others' to disobedience, does corruption in the land, because it is through obedience that one puts right the earth and the heaven. [340]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferable interpretation of the verse is that of those who said that . . . it was sent down concerning the hypocrites during the lifetime of the Messenger of God, although by it was meant all the hypocrites after them up to the Day of the Resurrection who have the same characteristic.

We say that the most appropriate interpretation of this verse is as we have mentioned because of the unanimous affirmation of the interpreters that this is the description of the hypocrites among the

Companions of the Messenger of God during his time, and that these verses were sent down concerning them. And the interpretation upon which there is a consensus 'of the authorities' is a better interpretation of the Qur'ān than an opinion for whose correctness there is no evidence from a basic principle (*aṣl*) or a parallel 'corroborating it'.

'Corruption in the land' is any action therein which God has forbidden and the omission of anything which He has commanded to be observed. This is the general meaning of 'corruption', as He has said in His Book concerning the words of the angels: «They said: 'What, will You set therein one who will do corruption there and shed blood . . . ?'» (2: 30), by which they meant: 'Will You set in the land one who will disobey You and act against Your command?' Such is the description of the hypocrites: those who do corruption in the land through their disobedience to their Lord therein, their perpetration therein of that which He has forbidden them to do, their omission of the duties He has imposed, their doubt about God's religion whose truth a person must attest and be certain of before He will accept any of his acts, their lying to the believers through their pretension to something other than the doubt and confusion in which they persisted, their assisting those who gave the lie to God, His Books, and His Messenger, against the friends (*awliyā'*) of God when they found a way to do this.

This is the corruption of the hypocrites in God's land, while they deem themselves to be putting things right therein by these acts of theirs. God will not let them escape His chastisement, nor ease for them the pain of the punishment He has prepared for the disobedient, just because they reckon that they are putting things right by their disobedience. Indeed, He has ordained for them the lowest pit of His Fire, the pain of His chastisement, and their dishonour in this world by His vilification of, and malediction on, them. For He has said: «Truly, they are the workers of corruption, but they are unaware.» This judgement of God concerning them is the best proof of His denial of those who maintain that God's punishments are only merited by someone who obdurately resists his Lord in His rights and ordinances, which He has imposed on him, after he has attained knowledge 'of these obligations', and after evidence has been established against him through his becoming aware that they are binding for him.

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLŪ INNAMĀ NAḤNU
MUṢLIḤŪNA

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«We are but the ones who put things right», i.e., they said: 'We only wish to put things right between the two parties of the believers and the people of scripture.'¹ [341]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

When they engage in disobedience to God, and it is said to them: 'Do not do such-and-such', they say: 'We are indeed putting things right according to right guidance.' [342]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: Whichever of these two 'interpretations' about their claim to be *muṣliḥūn* is true, there is no doubt that they reckoned that they were putting things right in whatever they were doing, whether their claim was to be putting things right between the Jews and the believers, or in their religious affairs, in the disobedience to God which they were committing, and in their lying to the believers in what they declared to them although they were inwardly convinced of something other than what they declared, because they thought they were doing right in all these affairs of theirs, although they were doing evil in God's eyes and opposing God's command. . . .

¹ *Muṣliḥ* is from the IVth form verb *aṣlaḥa*, and can mean, among other things, 'someone who puts something in order', 'someone who improves (a situation)', and 'someone who conciliates'.

2: 12

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

a-lā inna-hum humu 'l-mufsidūna wa-lākin lā yash'urūna

Are they not indeed the workers of corruption? But they are unaware.

THESE words of God are a denial of the claim of the hypocrites. When they were commanded to obey God in what He commanded them, and forbidden to disobey God in what He forbade them, they said: 'We are only putting things right, not working corruption; we are 'acting' according to right guidance in what you', the Muslims,¹ rebuke us for doing, not you; we are not astray.' But God gave them the lie for these words of theirs, saying: 'Are they not indeed the workers of corruption, going against God's command, transgressing His restrictions, being disobedient to Him, abandoning their duties to Him? Yet they are unaware and do not perceive that they are like this. . . .'

2: 13

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا
ءَامَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِنْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

*wa-idhā qīla la-hum āminū ka-mā āmana 'l-nāsu qālū a-nu'minu ka-mā
āmana 'l-sufahā'u a-lā inna-hum humu 'l-sufahā'u wa-lākin lā
ya'lamūna*

When it is said to them: 'Believe as the people believe', they say:
'Shall we believe as fools believe?' Are they not indeed the fools?
But they do not know.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDHĀ QĪLĀ*
LA-HUM ĀMINŪ
KA-MĀ ĀMANA 'L-NĀSU

¶ WHEN it is said to these people whom God has described as saying «We believe in God and the Last Day»; but they are not believers»: 'Attest the genuineness of Muḥammad and what he brought from God just as the people do'. 'The people' are . . . the believers who believed in Muḥammad, his prophethood, and what he brought from God.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

When it is said to them: 'Make your attestation as do the Companions of Muḥammad. Say: "He is the Prophet and the Messenger; what was sent down to him is the truth", and attest the truth of the Hereafter and that you will be awakened after death.'

[343]

There is a definite article before 'people'—though they were only some of the people, not all of them—because they were personally known by sight to those to whom this verse was addressed. So it means: 'Believe as do the people you know who are certain, and attest the truth, of God, Muḥammad, what he brought from God, and the Last Day.' . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF *QĀLŪ A-NU'MINU*
KA-MĀ ĀMANA 'L-SUFAHĀ'U

Sufahā' is the plural of *safih*, . . . which means: an ignorant person, whose judgement is weak, who knows little about what is beneficial and what is harmful. This is why God calls women and children *sufahā'*: «Do not give to fools (*sufahā'*) their property that God has assigned to you to manage.» (4: 5) The interpreters, as a whole, say that these are the women and children, because their judgement is weak and they have little knowledge of the advantageous and the harmful ways of disposing of their property.

The hypocrites referred in their reply . . . to the Companions of Muḥammad . . ., and they said: 'Shall we believe as the ignorant believe? Shall we attest the truthfulness of Muḥammad as do these who have no intellect or understanding?'

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

They mean the Companions of Muḥammad, because of their opposition 'to them' in their religion. [347, also 344. See also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 345; ⇒ Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid b. Aslam, 346]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *A-LĀ INNA-HUM HUMU 'L-SUFAHĀ'U*
WA-LĀKIN LĀ YA'LAMŪNA

This is an announcement from God that it is the hypocrites . . . who are ignorant in their religion, whose judgement about their beliefs and what they choose for themselves is weak because of their doubt and confusion concerning God, His Messenger, and his prophethood, about what he brought from God, and about the Awakening. They brought evil to themselves by these deeds of theirs, yet they reckoned that they were thereby doing good for themselves, and this is pure foolishness. . . .

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Are they not indeed the fools?», i.e.,¹ the ignorant; «But they do not know», i.e.,¹ but they do not realize. [348]

The reason that the definite article precedes 'fools' is the same as the reason it preceded 'people' . . .

This verse gives evidence for the error of those who say that God's punishment is merited only by those who stubbornly resist their Lord

after coming to know that that in which they resist Him is 'actually' correct, in the same way as did the other verses whose interpretation we have previously mentioned.¹ . . .

¹ i.e., verses 9 to 12 of this sura.

2: 14

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شُيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُونَ

wa-idhā laqu 'lladhīna āmanū qālū āmannā wa-idhā khalaw ilā shayāṭīni-him qālū innā ma'a-kum innamā nahnu mustahzi'ūna

When they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe', but when they go in seclusion to their satans, they say: 'We are with you; we were only mocking.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDHĀ LAQU 'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ*
QĀLŪ ĀMANNĀ WA-IDHĀ KHALAW ILĀ SHAYĀṬĪNI-HIM
QĀLŪ INNĀ MA'A-KUM

THIS verse is parallel to the other verse in which God announces the attempt of the hypocrites to deceive God, His Messenger and the believers, saying: «And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'». Then He refutes them, saying: «but they are not believers», and that they attempt to deceive God and those who believe by what they say. Similarly, in this verse, He announces that they declare to the believers who attest the truth of God, His Book, and His Messenger: 'We believe in, and attest the truthfulness of, Muḥammad and what he brought from God', hoping to deceive 'the believers in order to protect' their blood, their property, and their offspring, and 'trying to' ward off 'the believers' from them. But when they go in seclusion to their rebel 'friends', the haughty, the sinners, and the malicious among them and the other polytheists, who are on the same 'path' of unbelief in God, His Book, and His Messenger—these are their satans (*shaiṭān*, pl. *shayāṭīn*), and we have pointed out in a previous part of our book that the satans of everything

are the rebels therein¹—they say: «'We are with you'», i.e., 'We are with you in your religion, your helpers against those who oppose you therein, your friends, not those of the Companions of Muḥammad; «we were only mocking God», His Book, and His Messenger, and his Companions.'

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

There were some Jewish men who, when they met one or several of the Companions of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, would say: 'We follow your religion.' But when they went in seclusion to their own companions, who were their satans, they would say: «'We are with you; we were only mocking.'» [349; and 350. See also ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 357]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

The satans were their leaders in unbelief. [351]

⇒ Qatāda:

. . . 'Their satans' were their leaders in evil. . . [352]

(. .)

⇒ Mujāhid:

'Their satans were' their companions among the hypocrites and polytheists. [355; and 354, 358. See also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 356]

§ An objection is raised about whether the preposition *ilā* (*ilā shayāṭīni-him*) is correct here. Ṭabarī cites three opinions, two offered by a Baṣran grammarian and one by a Kūfan, and approves the reasoning of the Kūfan, because, unlike the Baṣran, who is forced to bend the meaning of *ilā*, he fully justifies its use on the grounds that the meaning is that the hypocrites went from their meeting with the believers to (*ilā*) their secluded meeting with their own kind.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *INNAMĀ NAḤNU*
MUSTAHZI'ŪNA

There is a unanimous consensus among the interpreters that the meaning of 'this' . . . is 'We were only mocking', i.e., . . . 'We were only making fun of the Companions of Muḥammad when we said "We believe in God and the Last Day."' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 359, 360; ⇒ Qatāda, 361; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 362]

¹ See *Intro.*, p. 47 and n. 61.

2: 15

اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ

*Allāhu yastahzī'u bi-him wa-yamuddu-hum fī ṭughyāni-him
ya'mahūna*

God shall mock them, and shall leave them in their transgression,
wandering about.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ALLĀHU YASTAHZĪ'U BI-HIM

[T]: *ISTAHZĀ'*/MOCKERY—ITS ATTRIBUTION TO GOD: FIRST OPINION: Some said . . . it is similar to what He announced He will do to them on the Day of the Resurrection when He said «Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed: 'Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light!', it shall be said: 'Return you back behind and seek for a light!' And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward whereof is chastisement. * They shall be calling unto them: 'Were we not with you?' They shall say: 'Yes, indeed . . . » (57: 13 and 14) It is also similar to what He announced He will do towards the unbelievers when He said «And let not the believers suppose that the indulgence We granted them is better for them; We grant them indulgence only that they might increase in sin.» (3: 178) «It is like¹ this and similar 'examples' of God's *istihzā'*, His deluding, deceiving, and devising against, the hypocrites and polytheists—according to those who hold this opinion and interpret it thus.

SECOND OPINION: Others said rather that His *istihzā'* is His censuring and blaming them for their disobedience to God and unbelief in Him; . . . «it is¹ His destruction and annihilation of them.† They said that this is what His devising, deceiving, and deriding is like.

THIRD OPINION: Others said that «'The hypocrites¹ would deceive God, but God is deceiving them» (4: 142) is a rejoinder, as when a person who gets the better of someone who was deceiving him says: 'It was I who deceived you!' There is no deception on such a person's part; he says this only because the affair turned out to his advantage. . . . Thus did God say «And they devised (*makarū*), and God devised, and God is

the best of devisers» (2: 54), and «God shall mock them» is 'also¹ a reply: God does not devise and mock, it means that devising and mockery rebound on them.

FOURTH OPINION: Others said that «'. . . we were only mocking.' * God shall mock them . . . », «'the hypocrites¹ would deceive God, but God is deceiving them» (4: 142), «. . . they deride (*yaskharūna*) 'the believers¹, but God derides them; . . . » (9: 79), «. . . they have forgotten God, and He has forgotten them» (9: 67), and similar 'examples¹, are God's announcements that He will requite them for their mockery, and punish them for 'their¹ deception. He used the same expression for His requital and punishment of them as He used for their action for which they deserved the punishment, although there are two different meanings 'to the expression¹. In the same way He said «. . . the requital of evil is evil—the like of it» (42: 40), where it is known that the first 'evil¹ is evil on the part of the perpetrator, because it is his disobedience to God, and the other 'so-called 'evil¹ is 'actually¹ justice, because it is God's requital for the . . . disobedience: the words are the same, but the meaning is different. Similarly, He said «Whoever commits aggression against you, do you commit aggression against him» (2: 194): the first aggression is unjust, but the second is a requital and not unjust, but rather just, for it is a punishment for the oppressor's injustice, although it is expressed by the same word as the first. They reasoned in the same way about every similar 'expression¹ in the Qur'ān—all those statements which refer to God's scheming against some group, or some similar reference.

FIFTH OPINION: Others said that . . . God stated that when the hypocrites mocked . . . they 'really¹ meant 'We declare to 'the believers¹ what we know to be false, not the truth, not right guidance.' This is one of the meanings of *istihzā'*. Then God announced that He «shall mock them»: He shall show them His judgements for them in this world, which differ from what He has for them in the Hereafter, in the same way as what they show the Prophet and the believers about 'their¹ religion is different from what they secretly maintain.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The correct opinion and interpretation, according to us, is that the meaning of *istihzā'* in the speech of the Arabs is the mocker's showing the mocked by word and deed what apparently pleases him, although he secretly causes evil against him. This is the meaning of 'deception', 'derision', and 'devising'.

According to this 'understanding,¹ God gives judgements for the hypocrites in this world according to what they declare with their tongues, . . . and this includes them among the number of those whom the name of Islam embraces, although inwardly they are something else. . . . Nevertheless, God knows they are lying; He is familiar with the wickedness of their beliefs, and with their doubt about what they claim to attest with their tongues. . . . When they assemble in the Hereafter among the number of those they were with in this world, they therefore suppose that they will enter where they go in. . . . But God has prepared for them the painful chastisement, the exemplary punishment, which He has prepared for His worst enemies and His sinning servants. So He will separate them from His friends, and admit them to the bottommost level of His hell-fire. It is therefore clear that God is mocking 'them'¹ . . . right up to the moment when He separates them, that He is deriding them, deceiving them, and devising against them. For the meaning of 'mocking', etc., is as we have described. It is not only the case in a situation when the person mocking is unjust to his partner or unfair to him; it is, rather, its meaning in all situations. . . .

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

He derides them so as to take revenge on them. [363]

As for those who claim that God's words «God shall mock them» are by way of a rejoinder¹ and are not a mocking, or a devising, or a deception, on the part of God: they deny 'the attribution' to God 'of' that which God has acknowledged in, and made necessary for, Himself. . . . To them it should be said: God has announced to us that He has schemed against a people who passed before us and whom we cannot see; and He has stated to us about others that He has caused them to be swallowed up 'by the ground',² and about others that He has caused them to be drowned.³ Now we attest the truth of God in these things of which He informed us, and we make no distinction between them. What is your proof for your distinguishing as you do when you claim that He drowned and caused to be swallowed up those He said He did, but that He did not scheme against those He said He did 'scheme against'? In this way we turn what they say against them, for whenever they say something about one of the 'se utterances', they have to say the same thing about the other.

If someone takes refuge in saying that mocking is a game, a diversion, and that it is precluded from God, it should be said to him: If you believe the matter to be as you describe 'in the case of' the meaning

of 'mocking', do you not say «God shall mock them», etc., although there can be no mocking . . . from God?

If he says 'No, 'I don't', he gives the Qur'ān the lie, and he has left the community of Islam.

If he says 'Yes, 'I do', it should be said to him: Would you say the same were you to state: «God shall mock them», thus He is playing with them and acting capriciously', although there is no playing, no game, on the part of God? If he says 'Yes', he has attributed to God what all Muslims agree on denying 'can be attributed' to Him; they are agreed on the guilt of someone who does attribute it to Him. . . .

If he says: I do not say that God is playing with them nor that He acts capriciously, but I do say He «shall mock them», . . . it should be said: You distinguish thus between the meaning of 'play' and 'caprice' . . . , and 'the meaning of' 'mockery', 'derision', 'scheming' and 'deception'. For the 'simple' reason that it is permissible to say one, but not the other, there must be a difference between the meanings of the two, and it is clear that each one of them has its own meaning.

The place for this kind of discussion is elsewhere, and we do not wish to prolong this book unduly by paying close attention to it. What we have mentioned should suffice for someone who can understand.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-YAMUDDU-HUM*

[T/L]: (...) The most correct opinion is that which says it means 'He gave them more (*yazīdu-hum*)' [⇒ Mujāhid, 365], in the sense of allowing 'them' to continue (*imlā'*) 'in' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 364], and abandoning them to, their arrogance and rebellion, as our Lord said He will do to those who are like them in His words «We shall turn about their hearts and their eyes, even as they believed not in it in the first time; and We shall leave them in their insolence wandering about.» (6: 110), that is, 'We shall leave them to it, abandon them to it, and give them time to add more to their sin.'

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FĪ-ṬUGHYĀNI-HIM*

One uses the word *ṭughyān* . . . when someone exceeds the limits of something and does wrong. Therefore God says: «No indeed; surely man transgresses (*yatghā*), * for he thinks himself self-sufficient» (96: 6 and 7), that is, he exceeds his bounds.†

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«*Fī-tughyāni-him*» means: 'In their unbelief. [367. See also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 366; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 370]

⇒ Al-Rabī' 'b. Anas¹:

«*Fī-tughyāni-him*» means: 'In their erring. [369. See also ⇒ Qatāda, 368; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 370]

THE INTERPRETATION OF YA 'MAHŪNA

'*Amiha* means 'to go astray', 'to err' (*dalla*).‡

¶ They return again and again, bewildered and lost, to their erring and unbelief, in the squalor of which they are immersed, with the filth of which they are covered; they can not find a way out of it because God has put a stamp on their hearts and sealed them, and blinded their eyes to right guidance and covered them over, so that they cannot see a proper course nor find their way.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«*Ya'mahūna*» means: 'They swayed to and fro in their unbelief. [371, and 372]

(..)

¹ See the third opinion above.

² See 16: 45, 17: 68, 28, 81 and 82, 29: 40, 34: 9 and 67: 16.

³ See, *inter alia*, 29: 40, 36: 43.

2: 16

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَتْ
تِجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ

*ulā'ika 'lladhīna 'shtarawu 'l-dalālata bi-'l-hudā fa-mā rabiḥat
tijāratu-hum wa-mā kānū muhtadīna*

Those are they who have purchased error at the price of right guidance, and their commerce has not profited them, and they are not rightly guided.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ULĀ'IKA 'LLADHĪNA 'SHTARAWU 'L-DHALĀLATA BI-'L-HUDĀ

QUESTION: How could these people have purchased error (*dalāla*) at the price of right guidance (*hudā*), when they were hypocrites whose hypocrisy was not preceded by 'true' belief so that one could say they sold the right guidance which they followed for the error for which they exchanged it? You know that the meaning of *shirā'* (= purchase, buying) is the concept of accepting something in exchange for something else, as a substitute for it, but the hypocrites whom God has thus described, never followed right guidance so that they might have left it and accepted unbelief and hypocrisy as a substitute for it.

REPLY: [T]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Those are they who have purchased error at the price of right guidance», i.e., unbelief at the price of 'true' belief. [380]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They took up error and abandoned right guidance. [381]

⇒ Qatāda:

They preferred error to right guidance. [382]

⇒ Mujāhid:

They believed, then they reneged their belief. [383 and 384]

According to those who say, in interpreting this, 'they took up error and abandoned right guidance'¹, i.e., Ibn 'Abbās *et al.*¹, they make *shirā'* (=purchase) mean: Accepting the thing purchased in lieu of the price for which it is bought.

They therefore say that this is what happened with the hypocrite and the unbeliever: they both took up unbelief in place of belief, and this was their purchase of unbelief and error, which they took up by abandoning right guidance which they rejected. The right guidance which they abandoned was the price for which they exchanged the error which they took.

As for those who interpret «*ishtaraw*» to mean 'they preferred'¹, i.e., Qatāda¹, they take the fact that God described the unbelievers elsewhere as preferring unbelief to right guidance, and said «As for Thamud, We guided them, but they preferred blindness to guidance» (41:17), to understand «*ishtaraw*» in this way. . . .[‡]

Although this gives a possible interpretation, I do not prefer it, for God said «their commerce (*tijāratu-hum*) has not profited them», thereby indicating that the meaning 'of the first part of the verse'¹ . . . is the meaning of 'purchase' with which the people are acquainted: The exchange of one thing for another, taking one thing as a substitute for another.

As for those who say that 'the members of'¹ this group were once believers but reneged their belief, there would be no objection to them if the matter were as they describe, because, if the matter were so, 'these people'¹ would have abandoned belief and taken unbelief in exchange as a substitute for right guidance. This is what is understood from the meanings of 'purchase' and 'sale (*bai'*)'. But the evidence about their characteristics from the beginning to the end of these verses shows that 'this'¹ group was never illuminated by the light of true belief and 'never'¹ entered the community of Islam. Do you not hear God, from the beginning . . . 'to the end'¹ of His description of them, describing them only in terms of their verbal declaration of lies . . . ? Where is the evidence that they were once believers and then reneged?

If the holder of this opinion supposes that this 'verse'¹ . . . is itself the evidence that these people were once believers and then turned from that to unbelief, and that that is why they were told: «'they'¹ purchased», this interpretation cannot be conceded to him, because *ishtirā'*, according to his opponents, is the taking up of one thing while leaving something else, or else it means 'choice', or has some other meaning. When a word has several possible aspects, no one may turn its meaning

exclusively towards one of these aspects and not towards the others except by 'giving'¹ an incontrovertible proof.

The preferred interpretation of the verse, in my view, is the interpretation, narrated from Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd [381 above], that . . . it means they took up error and abandoned right guidance. That is to say that every unbeliever in God has taken unbelief in exchange for belief by acquiring the unbelief which he manifested, rather than the true belief, to which he was commanded. Do you not hear God saying about him who accepts unbelief in Him instead of belief in Him and His Messenger «Whoso exchanges (*yatabaddal*) belief for unbelief has surely strayed from the right way» (2: 108)? This, then, is the meaning of 'purchase', because whoever purchases something takes, at the price which was taken from him, another thing instead. Thus it is with the hypocrites and unbelievers, they took error and hypocrisy at the price of true guidance; God has led them astray, and deprived them of the light of guidance. He has abandoned all of them to darkness, and they cannot see.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-MĀ RABIḤAT TIJĀRATU-HUM

The interpretation of this is that the hypocrites, by their purchase of error rather than guidance, incurred a loss and did not profit, because the merchant who profits receives for the commodity which he owned a substitute which is either more valuable than the commodity he owned, or greater than the price for which he sold it. However, he who receives for his commodity a substitute which is less than 'what he had before'¹, or lower than the price for which he sold it, is undoubtedly the loser in his commerce. Thus it is with the unbeliever and the hypocrite, because they have preferred confusion and blindness to sound direction and right guidance, fear and fright to protection and security; they have hastily exchanged sound direction for confusion, error for right guidance, fear for protection, fright for security, despite the painful chastisement and mighty punishment which has been prepared for them eventually. They have failed and lost; this is manifest loss.

⇒Qatāda:

By God, you have seen them going from guidance into error, from the community (*jamā'a*) into scission, from security into fear, and from the *sunna* into innovation (*bid'a*).¹ [385]

§ The Arabic «*fa-mā rabiḥat tijāratu-hum*» literally means 'their commerce has not profited', and so it might seem reasonable to object that it is not the commerce but the merchant who profits or loses. Ṭabarī, however, explains, with examples from poetry, that the Arabs sometimes use expressions like *nāma lailuka* (= lit., 'Your night has slept') to mean 'You have slept through the night', and that, accordingly, the verse should be understood to mean 'their commerce has not profited *them*'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MĀ KĀNŪ MUHTADĪNA*

By His words «and they are not rightly guided», 'God' means that they were not rightly guided when they preferred error to right guidance, took unbelief rather than belief, and purchased hypocrisy at the price of attesting and averring the truth.

¹ The word *sunna* means 'custom' or 'practice'. It is used in two principal technical senses: the *sunna* of God (e.g., in 17: 77, 33: 62, 35: 43, 48: 23), and the *sunna* of the Prophet (not a Qur'ānic usage). The latter is the sense which occurs most frequently in Traditions, where it refers to Muḥammad's utterances, actions, and tacit approval, and to the practice established by him. Its opposite, in this second sense, is *bid'a* (= innovation), that which is not sanctioned by *sunna*. It is also possible that in this Tradition these terms are being used in the more general sense of the *sunna* of the Community and deviation therefrom.

2: 17

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ
ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمٍ لَا يَبْصُرُونَ

*mathalu-hum ka-mathali 'lladhi 'stauqada nāran fa-lammā aḍā'at mā
ḥaula-hu dhahaba 'llāhu bi-nūri-him wa-taraka-hum fī ḡulumātin lā
yubṣirūna*

Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire, and, after it lit all about him, God took away their light, and left them in darkness, unseeing,

QUESTION: How can it be said: «Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire», when you know that 'their' alludes to a collection of men, or men and women, and 'one' refers to a single

male? How can He make a statement about a single person a simile for a group? Why is it not said: 'Their likeness is as the likeness of those who kindled a fire'? If you permit a single person to be used as a simile for a group, do you allow someone who sees a group of men whose forms, and the perfection of whose physique and bodies delight him, to say 'It is as if they—or their bodies—were a date-palm'?

REPLY: In the place where our Lord likened a group of the hypocrites to a single person, whom He made an example for their actions, it is quite properly permitted, 'as it is' in similar instances, when He likewise said «their eyes rolling like one who swoons from death» (33: 19), i.e., like the rolling of the eye which swoons from death, and «your creation and your awakening are but as a single soul» (31: 28), meaning: but as the awakening of a single soul.

But the comparison of the group of men, with respect to their tallness and perfection of physique, to a single date-palm is not permissible, nor are similar 'examples', because of a difference between the two 'sides of the comparison'.

The comparison between the group of hypocrites and the single fire-kindler is permissible because the intention behind the statement about the likeness of the hypocrites is a statement about the likeness of their being illuminated by their averring declarations, although they secretly held other ruinous beliefs, and by their mixing of their secret hypocrisy with apparent avowals of true belief; and there is a single meaning, not a variety of meanings, to their being illuminated, even though the individuals 'being illuminated' are various. . . .

The interpretation is: The likeness of the hypocrites' being illuminated—by the attestation of the truth of God, Muḥammad, and what he brought, which they declared, while in their belief they were giving it the lie—is as the likeness of the fire-kindler's being illuminated. Then mention of 'being illuminated' is omitted, and the likeness is attributed to them 'instead', † 'because' it is understood by the listeners, through what is expressed, that the simile is being coined for these people's 'being illuminated' by what they aver, rather than for their real corporeal instances.

Because of what we have described, it is permissible and proper that His saying «their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire» should compare, in words, the group with a single person, because the intention behind the comparison is, in meaning, a single thing. But when it is intended to express a comparison between a collection of

individual human beings, or actual things which have forms and bodies, and something 'else', the correct way is to compare group with group, and single thing with single thing, because each single item . . . is different from the 'others'.

Because of this semantic aspect, there is a difference between what is said when comparing actions and 'what is said when comparing other kinds of' nouns. It is permissible to compare the actions of a collection of people, and other things, when they have a single meaning, with the action of a single thing, and then to omit the nouns 'denoting' the actions and relate the likeness to those who perform the action. Thus one says: 'Their actions were just like the action of a dog'; then the omission is made and one says: 'Their actions were like a dog', or 'like dogs', when one means 'like the action of a dog', or 'like the action of dogs'. But it is not permissible to say: 'They were just like a date-palm', when one intends to compare their bodies to date-palms in tallness and perfection.

(...)

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

God has coined a simile for the hypocrites, and has said «Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire, and, after it lit all about him, God took away their light, and left them in darkness, unseeing», i.e., 'not' seeing the truth and affirming it, so that, when they emerged with it from the darkness of unbelief, they smothered it with their unbelief in it, and with their hypocrisy about it; so He left them in the darkness of unbelief, and they could not recognize right guidance and could not uphold the truth. [386]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

This simile which God has coined for the hypocrites 'shows' that they sought power through 'falsely professing' Islam, so that the Muslims intermarried with them, and treated them as heirs and shared booty with them; but, when they died, God deprived them of this power, just as He deprived the possessor of fire of the light. «And left them in darkness», i.e., in torment. [387]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

Some people entered Islam when the Prophet arrived in Medina, and then became hypocrites. Their likeness was as the likeness of a man who was in darkness, and who kindled a fire which shed light for him on the vexing and harmful things around him, so that he perceived them and knew what he should be on his guard against. While things were thus, his fire went out, and he started to be unaware of the harmful things he should guard against. Such is the case of the hypocrite: he was in the darkness of polytheism and then he professed Islam; then he knew what is permitted and what is forbidden, what is good and what is bad. While things were thus, he turned to unbelief, and he came not to know what is permitted and what is forbidden, what is good and what is bad. The light is belief in what Muḥammad brought; and the darkness is their hypocrisy. [388]

FOURTH OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

God coins it as a simile for the hypocrites. As for the light, it is their true belief which they gave voice to; as for the darkness, it is their erring and unbelief which they gave voice to. They were a group who had followed right guidance but were then deprived of it; after this they became arrogant. [389]

FIFTH OPINION

⇒ Qatāda:

The hypocrite said 'There is no god but God', and 'this testimony' shed light for him in the world: he married Muslims by it, went on razzias with the Muslims by it, inherited from these Muslims by it, and his blood and property were protected by it. But when he died, the hypocrite was deprived of this, because there was no root to it in his heart, and no reality in his knowledge. [390, and 391]

⇒ Al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim:

The light is their belief which they give voice to, and the darkness is their error and unbelief. [392]

SIXTH OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

The light of the fire: their drawing near to the believers and right guidance. The dwindling of their light: their drawing near to the unbelievers and going astray. [393, 394, 395]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

The brightness and light of the fire is what kindled it, and when it died out, its light went away. Thus it was with the hypocrite: whenever he said the Confession of Pure Faith (*kalimat al-ikhlas*, = 'There is no god but God'), it cast light for him, but when he doubted, he tumbled into the darkness. [396. See also ⇒ 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Zaid, 397]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferred interpretation of the verse is what Qatāda [390, 391] and al-Ḍaḥḥāk [392] said, and what was narrated from Ibn 'Abbās [387], that is to say: God coined this simile for the hypocrites . . . , not for those who publicly announced their unbelief and proclaimed their polytheism. If the simile had been 'coined' for those who believed with a genuine belief, and then proclaimed unbelief with a genuine proclamation, as those supposed who interpreted . . . 'this verse to mean' that the light of the fire is a simile for the faith which they genuinely held, and that the diminishing of their light is a simile for their genuine reversion and proclamation of unbelief, then there was no deception or derision in their souls, nor any hypocrisy. . . . The designation of hypocrisy would then be inapplicable to them since, in their state of genuine belief, they would be believers, and in their state of genuine unbelief, they would be unbelievers; there would not then be any third state in which they would be hypocrites.

(...)

¶ The likeness of the hypocrites being illuminated—by 'their' verbal affirmation to the Messenger of God of his veracity, and by their saying to him and the believers: 'We believe in God, His Books, His Messengers, and the Last Day', so that they were thereby judged in the present world as the Muslims were, with respect to the sparing of blood and property, the security of their offspring from captivity, marriage, and inheritance—is as the likeness of the fire-kindler's being illuminated by the fire: once he profits from its brightness and sees the darkness around him illuminated by its light, the fire goes out and his light

disappears, and the one seeking illumination by it returns to darkness and confusion.

The hypocrite continued to seek illumination by the light of words with which he protected himself from death and captivity in his 'terrestrial' life, despite his secretly believing what would have entailed necessary death and deprivation of property had he declared it. His soul caused him to imagine that he was thereby deriding and deceiving God, His Messenger, and the believers, and enticed him into thinking that when he came to his Lord in the Hereafter he would be saved from 'punishment' by the same lying and hypocrisy which saved him in this world. Have you not heard God saying, when He described them and then announced what will happen when they come to Him: «Upon the day when God shall awaken them all together, and they will swear to Him, as they swear to you, and think they are on something. Surely, they are the liars!» (58: 18)? . . . But God will extinguish their light on the Day of the Resurrection, and they will ask the believers to wait so that they can ask to borrow their light, but they will be told to return back and seek a light, and to roast in hell-fire. When God takes away their light and leaves them in darkness, unseeing, just as He extinguishes the kindler's fire after it has shed light for him, he will be left in his darkness, confused and wandering. God says: «Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed: 'Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light', it shall be said: 'Return you back behind, and seek for a light!' And a wall shall be set up between them having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward whereof is chastisement. They shall be calling unto them: 'Were we not with you?' They shall say: 'Yes indeed; but you tempted yourselves, and you awaited, and you were in doubt, and fancies deluded you, until God's commandment came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God. Therefore today no ransom shall be taken from you, neither from those who disbelieved. Your refuge is the Fire. That is your master—an evil homecoming!'» (57: 13-15)

(...)

2: 18

صُمُّكُمْ عَنْهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ

ṣummun bukmun 'umyun fa-hum lā yarji'ūna

deaf, dumb, blind—so they shall not return.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *ṢUMMUN BUKMUN 'UMYUN*
FA-HUM LĀ YARJĪ'ŪNA

SINCE the interpretation of 'the previous verse' . . . is as we have described it—that it is God's announcement about what He will do to the hypocrites in the Hereafter—, . . . it is clear that His words «deaf, dumb, blind—so they shall not return» are a delayed sentence intended to precede in meaning, and that the meaning of the 'whole' sentence is: Those who bought error at the price of guidance, so that their commerce has not profited them and they have not been rightly guided, are deaf, dumb, blind, and they shall not return. Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindled a fire, and when it lit all about him God took away their light, and left them in darkness, unseeing; or as the likeness of a cloudburst out of heaven.¹

§ Ṭabarī gives two reasons for the nominative reading «*ṣummun bukmun 'umyun*», and two for an alternative accusative reading «*ṣumman bukman 'umyan*», but he eventually rejects such an accusative reading on the grounds that no one can go against the record of the *muṣḥafs* of the Muslims.

This, then, is an announcement from God about the hypocrites: that in buying error at the price of guidance, they did not follow right guidance and the truth, but rather that they were deaf to, and hence could not hear, either of them, because they were defeated by God's abandoning them, and had lost the power to speak, and hence to reason, with them, . . . and were blind, and hence could not see and understand them, because God had sealed their hearts with their hypocrisy so that they were not rightly guided. What we say about this is the same as the learned interpreters say.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'They are' «deaf, dumb, blind» to the good. [398]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

They did not hear the guidance, nor see it, nor understand it. [399]

(..)

⇒ Qatāda:

They are deaf to the truth, so they do not hear it; blind to the truth, so they do not see it; and cannot voice the truth, so they do not pronounce it. [401]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-HUM LĀ YARJĪ'ŪNA*

His words «so they shall not return», is an announcement from God . . . that they shall not return to renouncing their error, and shall not turn in repentance from their hypocrisy. He takes away from the believers all hope that 'these people' will see right guidance, or speak the truth, or hear one who calls to guidance, or that they will mind and turn from error, just as He takes away from 'them' all hope for the repentance of the leaders of the unbelievers of the people of scripture, or the polytheists and their learned men, on whose hearts and hearing He has said He has set a seal, and on whose eyes, a covering.

⇒ Qatāda:

They will not repent, nor will they mind. [402]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They will not return to Islam. [403]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«They shall not return», i.e., they shall not return to right guidance, nor to the good; they shall not attain salvation as long as they do what they are doing. [404, the continuation of 398]

The reading seems to be against this latter interpretation, for it says that God announces about this group that they will not return, . . . without restricting this condition of theirs to any particular time or any particular situation. But the report we have mentioned from Ibn 'Abbās says that this characteristic of theirs is restricted to a time, which is as long as they persist in their affair, and that they have a way to turn from it. But this is a false claim in this interpretation, for which there is no evidence from its ostensive 'meaning', or from any report establishing an incontrovertible proof.

¹ See the exegesis of the following verse.

2: 19-20

أَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَجْعَلُونَ أَصْبَعَهُمْ فِيْٓ أَذَانِهِمْ مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُحِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ * يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطَفُ أَبْصَرَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَّشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَرِهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

*aw ka-ṣaiyibin mina 'l-samā'i fī-hi ẓulumātun wa-ra'dun wa-barqun yaj'alūna aṣābi'a-hum fī ādhāni-him mina 'l-ṣawā'iqi ḥadhara 'l-mauti wa-'llāhu muḥīṭun bi-'l-kāfirīna * yakādu 'l-barqu yakḥṭafu abṣāra-hum kullamā aḏā'a la-hum mashaw fī-hi wa-idhā aẓlama 'alay-him qāmū wa-law shā'a 'llāhu la-dhahaba bi-sam'i-him wa-abṣāri-him inna 'llāha 'alā kulli shai'in qadīrun*

or as a downpour out of the sky in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning—they put their fingers in their ears against the thunderbolt, fearful of death; and God encompasses the unbelievers; * the lightning wellnigh snatches away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they walk in it, and when it grows dark over them, they halt; had God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight. Truly, God is powerful over everything.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *AW KA-ṢAIYIBIN MINA 'L-SAMĀ'I*

ṢAIYIB comes from the [1st form] verb *ṣāba*, which can have the meaning 'to drop', 'to come down', when the subject is 'rain'.† . . . What we say about this is confirmed by what the interpreters say.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«*Ṣaiyib*» is rain (*qaṭr*). [405]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

'Aṭā' said to me: '*Al-ṣaiyib* is rain (*maṭar*)'. [406]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Al-ṣaiyib is rain (*maṭar*). [407, 409, 415; also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions, 408; ⇒ Qatāda, 410, 411; ⇒ Mujāhid, 413; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 414; ⇒ 'Aṭā', 418]

(. .)

⇒ Mujāhid:

Al-ṣaiyib is the early spring rain (*rabī'*). [412]

⇒ 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid:

'This means: Like abundant rain (*ghaith*) from the sky. [416]

⇒ Sufyān:

Al-ṣaiyib: that in which is rain. [417]

¶ The likeness of the hypocrites' seeking illumination by the light of their avowal of Islam, despite their concealment of unbelief, is the likeness of the fire-kindler's illumination by the light of his fire, according to those characteristics which God has described; or 'again' it is as the likeness of darkening rain which falls steadily from a cloud-gap in the sky, and is borne by a pitch-dark rain-cloud on a tenebrous night. This is the darkness which God states is in 'the sky'.

OBJECTION: Are these both similes for the hypocrites, or is only one of them? If they are both similes for the hypocrites, then why is it «or like a downpour», when 'or' introduces a sense of doubt into the sentence, and not «and like a downpour», with 'and' . . . ? If only one of them is a simile for this group, why begin the next phrase with 'or'? You know that 'or' introduces doubt about his statement on the part of the person speaking . . . , but it is not permissible in the case of God that doubt should be attached to Him in anything, or that knowledge of anything should escape Him, either in what He communicates or in what He refrains from communicating.

REPLY: The matter here is quite different from what you believe. Although 'or' can, in some cases, introduce a sense of doubt, it also points to the same thing as 'and' does.‡ Such is the case with «or as a downpour from the sky». . . . Similarly, the reason for omitting 'the likeness' from «or as a downpour» 'is that', since His words «as the likeness of a fire-kindler . . . » indicate that the meaning of this 'phrase' is 'as the likeness of a downpour', He omitted 'likeness' and dispensed

with a repeated mention of 'likeness' for the sake of conciseness and brevity.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FĪ-HI ṢULUMĀTUN WA-RA'DUN
WA-BARQUN YAJ'AL ŪNA AṢĀBI'A-HUM FĪ ĀDHĀNI-HIM MINA
'L-ṢAWĀ'IQI ḤADHARA 'L-MAUTI WA-'LLĀHU MUḤĪṬUN
BI-'L-KĀFIRĪNA * YAKĀDU 'L-BARQU YAKḤṬAFU
ABṢĀRA-HUM KULLAMĀ AḌĀ'LA-HUM MASHAW FĪ-HI
WA-IDHĀ AḶLAMA 'ALAY-HIM QĀMŪ

Ṣulumāt is the plural of *ṣuluma* (= darkness).

[T]: RA'D (= THUNDER): FIRST OPINION: Some of them said it is an angel who holds back the clouds.

⇒ Mujāhid:

Thunder is an angel who drives along the clouds by his voice.
[419, 420, 421; and also, in reduced form, 428, 432]

(..)

⇒ Shahr b. Ḥaushab:

Thunder is an angel in charge of driving on the clouds—as the camel-driver drives on the camels—praising 'God'. Whenever one cloud clashes with another, he screams at it; and, when he becomes violently angry, fire rushes out from within him, and this is the thunderbolts (*ṣawā'iq*) which you see. [423]

(..)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Thunder is an angel who drives the clouds along by praising and glorifying 'God'. [425]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Al-Ra'd is the name of an angel, and this voice of his is his praising 'God'. When he drives the clouds along with violence, they shake and scrape against each other; then lightning is emitted from within them. [426]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Thunder is an angel who drives on the clouds with praise 'of

God', just as the camel-driver drives on camels with his chanting.
[427]

(..)

§ Ṭabarī gives further similar Traditions ⇒ 'Ikrima [429, 431, 435], ⇒ Qatāda [430], ⇒ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib [433].

SECOND OPINION: Others said that thunder is a wind which is constricted beneath the clouds and then rises, and from this comes the noise.

⇒ 'Furāt b. Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qazzāz al-Tamīmī:

Ibn 'Abbās wrote to Abu 'l-Jald asking him about thunder. He replied: 'Thunder is a wind.' [438. See also ⇒ Abū Kathīr, 437]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: If thunder is what Ibn 'Abbās and Mujāhid said, the meaning of the verse is: Or like a downpour from the sky in which is darkness and the voice of thunder. For if thunder is an angel driving on the clouds, he cannot be in the downpour, because the downpour is that which drops from the direction of the clouds, and thunder is in the air of the sky driving on the clouds. On the other hand, if he was there in the 'rain', he would have no audible voice, and there would be nothing there for anyone to be frightened of. One says: 'With every drop of rain there is an angel', so, if he was with the downpour, when his voice would not be heard, he would be no more than one of these angels who come down with the drops 'of rain' to the earth, in that there would be nothing for anyone to fear in him. If the matter is as we have described it from what Ibn 'Abbās said, then it is clear that the meaning of the verse is: Or as the likeness of an abundant rain which drops from a sky in which is darkness and the voice of thunder. . . . There is no need to mention his voice, because mentioning him by name indicates the intention behind what is said. If thunder is what Abu 'l-Jald says [438 above], then there is nothing 'such as 'sound' omitted from His words «in which is darkness and thunder», because it then means 'in which is darkness and thunder' which is what we have described.

[T]: BARQ (= LIGHTNING): FIRST OPINION

⇒ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib:

Lightning is the scourges of the angels. [439]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Lightning is the scourges in the hands of the angels driving along the clouds. [440]

⇒ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib:

Thunder is the angel, and lightning is his striking the clouds with an iron scourge. [441]

SECOND OPINION: Others say it is the whip of light with which the angel drives along the clouds. 'Ibn 'Abbās' is mentioned as having said this [442].

THIRD OPINION

⇒ 'Furāt b. Abī 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Qazzāz al-Tamīmī':

Ibn 'Abbās wrote to Abu 'l-Jald asking him about *barq*. He replied: '*Al-barq* is water.' [444. See also ⇒ Abū Kathīr, 443; ⇒ A Baṣran reciter, 445]

FOURTH OPINION: Others say it is an angel's striking 'with a sword, scourge, etc.'.†

⇒ Mujāhid:

Al-barq is the striking by an angel. [446]

⇒ Ibn Muslim al-Ṭā'ift:

It has reached me that *al-barq* is an angel with four faces: a face of a man, a face of a bull, a face of an eagle, and a face of a lion. When he strikes (*maṣa'a*) with his wings, that is lightning (*barq*). [447. See also ⇒ Shu'aib al-Jabā'ī, 448]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Al-barq is an angel. [449]

(...)

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: It is possible that what 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Ibn 'Abbās, and Mujāhid said has a single meaning, which is that the scourges which 'Alī, may God be pleased with him, said are the lightning, are the whips of light with which the angel drives along the clouds, as Ibn 'Abbās said. And the angel's urging on the clouds with them is his striking (*maṣa'a*) them; that is to say, the basic meaning of

'the 1st form verb' *maṣa'a* among the Arabs is to combat with swords; it is then used in connection with everything with which wars, and other 'kinds of combat', were fought.† Mujāhid seems to have said 'the striking by an angel', only because the clouds do not fight the angel, rather that the thunder strikes them, and he used the verbal noun from the verb 'to strike'.

We have already mentioned what Shahr b. Ḥaushab said about *ṣā'iqa* (= thunderbolt) [423 above].

[T]: THE VERSES AS A WHOLE: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Or as a downpour out of the sky in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning—they put their fingers in their ears against the thunderbolts, fearful of death . . .», i.e., they are, with respect to the darkness of unbelief in which they find themselves, their worry that they will be killed by virtue of their opposition, and their fear of you, in the same state as the one who is in the darkness of a downpour, as He has described: he puts his fingers in his ears against the thunderbolts, fearful of death. «. . . the lightning wellnigh snatches away their sight . . .», i.e., because of the intensity of the light of truth, «. . . whensoever it giveth them light, they walk in it, and when it grows dark over them, they halt . . .», i.e., 'when' they recognize the truth and give voice to it, they 'walk' straight by their profession of it, but when they withdraw from it into unbelief, they stand still, bewildered. [451]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

'In these two verses, 19 and 20, *ṣaiyib* is rain. Two men from the hypocrites of Medina had deserted the Messenger of God for the polytheists, and were caught in this rain 'storm' which God mentions, in which there was loud thunder, thunderbolts, and lightning. Whenever the thunderbolts threw light upon them, they would stick their fingers in their ears out of fear that the thunderbolts would enter into their ears and kill them. When the lightning flashed, they would proceed in its light, but, when it did not flash, they could not see, and halted where they were and did not proceed. They began to say: 'If only we could reach daybreak, we could go to Muḥammad and put our hands in his 'in

allegiance¹. Then the day rose on them, and they went to him and professed Islam; they put their hands in his, and their Islam became good.

God took the case of these two seceding hypocrites as an example for the hypocrites of Medina. When the hypocrites attended the Prophet's sessions, they would put their fingers in their ears out of fear of the speech of the Prophet, that a revelation concerning them should come down, or that something should be mentioned about them and they would be killed, just like those two seceding hypocrites who stuck their fingers in their ears, and, when there was light, walked in it. When 'the hypocrites' gained much wealth and had sons, and shared in booty or conquest, they would walk on in 'this prosperity' and say: 'The religion of Muḥammad is a religion of truthfulness.' They would go straight on it, just as these two hypocrites had proceeded: when the lightning shone upon them, they proceeded in it¹'s light¹, and when darkness fell on them they stood still. But when their property was wiped out and girls were born to them, and misfortune afflicted them, the 'hypocrites' would say: 'This is due to the religion of Muḥammad.' So they would turn back to unbelief, just as these two hypocrites had stood still when the lightning 'stopped and' darkness fell on them. [452]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Or as a downpour from the sky . . .», like rain, «. . . in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning . . .», to the end of the verse; this is the likeness of the hypocrite in the light of what he says and does in accordance with what he has of the Book of God, dissembling to the people. But when he retires alone, he acts contrary to it. He is then in darkness as long as he persists in it. The darkness is errancy (*ḍalāla*), the lightning is belief (*īmān*), and 'they' are the people of scripture. When they are left in darkness, they are the same as a man who grabs onto the edge of the truth, but cannot get beyond it. [453]

FOURTH OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Or as a downpour from the sky . . .», which is the rain. Thereby

'God' coins a simile in the Qur'ān. When He says «. . . in which is darkness . . .», He means 'affliction'; «. . . and thunder . . .», He means 'in it there is alarm'; «. . . and lightning . . .», «. . . the lightning wellnigh snatches away their sight . . .», He means that the clear 'part' (*muḥkam*) of the Qur'ān points out the deficiencies of the hypocrites; «. . . whenever it gives them light, they walk in it . . .», He means that whenever the hypocrites obtain some power from Islam they are at rest, whereas if Islam is struck by a misfortune, they halt so as to turn back to unbelief. He says «. . . and when it grows dark over them, they halt . . .», which is like His words: «And among men there is such a one as serves God upon the very edge—if good befalls him he is at rest in it, but if a trial befalls him he turns completely over; he loses this world and the world to come; that indeed is the manifest loss. [454]

Then all the other interpreters differ subsequently, reflecting the differences which are narrated from Ibn 'Abbās.

⇒ Mujāhid:

The lightning's bringing light and darkness is 'in continuation of' this simile. [455, 456, and 457]

⇒ Qatāda, concerning these verses . . .:

When the hypocrite sees in Islam prosperity, safety, and solace from the hardships of life, he says: 'I am with you; I am one of you.' But when a calamity befalls him, by God, he tears off on it and is then unable to throw off despair, for he has no patience in misfortune, and does not anticipate the wages thereof nor foresee the outcome. [458]

⇒ Qatāda:

'«. . . in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning . . .».'¹ The most cowardly of people who do not hear anything unless they suppose themselves to be perishing because of it, fearful of death; «. . . God encompasses the unbelievers . . .». Then He coins another simile for them, and says «. . . the lightning wellnigh snatches away their sight; whenever it gives light, they walk in it . . .»; He means: 'This hypocrite, when his possessions increase, his livestock multiplies and he is in good health, says: "Nothing but good has happened to me since I entered this religion of mine." '«. . . and when it grows dark over them, they halt . . .»; He means: 'When

their possessions dwindle, and their livestock is destroyed, and misfortune befalls them, they halt, bewildered.' [459]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

«... in which is darkness, and thunder, and lightning...»¹ Their likeness is as the likeness of a people who travel on a dark night, when there is rain, and thunder and lightning, along the way. When there is a flash of lightning, they see the road and proceed along it; but when the lightning dies down they are confused. Thus it is with the hypocrite; whenever he utters the Testimony of Pure Faith (*kalimat al-ikhlas*),¹ light shines forth for him, but when he doubts he is confused, and falls down into darkness. Thus also are His words «... whenever it gives them light, they walk in it; and when it grows dark over them, they halt...»... in their ears and eyes, by using which they move among people; «... had God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight...». [460]

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

'Abd al-Rahmān b. Zaid... recited... 'these two verses', and said: 'This also is a simile which God coins for the hypocrites: they seek light through Islam [⇒ Al-Dahhāk b. Muzāhim, 461, '... the lightning is faith'], just as this person 'in the verse' seeks illumination from the light of this lightning. [462]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

There is nothing in the world which he hears without thinking it is about him, and that it spells death, because of his horror of it—and the hypocrite has the greatest horror of death among the creatures of God. It is as if they were in a wilderness in a rainstorm, trying to¹ escape from the thunderbolts. [463]

⇒ 'Atā':

It is a simile coined for the unbeliever. [464]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: Now, although these opinions which we have quoted from those we narrated them from differ in the forms of expression used by those who said them, they are close to one another in meaning, because together they announce that God coins the downpour as a simile for the apparent belief of the hypocrite; He likens the darkness in it to his errancy; the shining of the lightning in it to the

light of his belief; his guarding himself against the thunderbolts by sticking his fingers in his ears, to his faint-heartedness and craven spirit due to 'his fear of' God's punishment falling on him; his walking in the light of the lightning, to his uprightness in the light of his belief; and his halting in the darkness, to his confusion in his errancy and his setback in his stray roaming.

Since the matter is as we have described it, the interpretation of the verse¹ is that 'they are' a simile for what the hypocrites sought illumination by¹, i.e., their duplicitous belief¹... and 'for' their not knowing which of the two ways laid out for them was right guidance: unbelief, which was their way before God sent Muḥammad with what He sent him with for them; or that which Muḥammad had brought them from their Lord. They were apprehensive about God's threat to them through the tongue of Muḥammad, and, at the same time as being apprehensive about it, they doubted its truth—«in their hearts is a sickness and God has added to their sickness» (2: 10). It is as the likeness of heavy nocturnal rain in pitch-dark clouds on a dark night; thunder drives them on, the violent lightning bursts its flashes forth from their edges, flailing about; the brilliance of the lightning almost perishes the eyes, dazzling them with the strength of its effulgence and the light of its shafts; time after time, thunderbolts are flung down from the 'clouds', and souls almost succumb from the violence of the mortifying terror.

The 'downpour', then, is the likeness of the verbal declaration by the hypocrites of their avowal and attestation of the truth; the 'darkness' which is there is 'the likeness' of the darkness of 'their' doubt, disbelief, and the sickness of 'their' heart¹s, which they kept secret. As for the thunder and the thunderbolts, it is a likeness for their apprehension about God's threat to them, on the tongue of His Messenger in the verses of His Book, that 'they' would be punished, now or in the future, while at the same time they doubted the 'threat': did it exist or not? was it real or was it a lie and false? As a result of their apprehension about whether this was true 'or not', they protected themselves against it by verbally attesting the truth of what Muḥammad brought, out of fear of destruction befalling them and of the retribution that would come down on them. This is the interpretation of His words «... they put their fingers in their ears against the thunderbolts, fearful of death...», by which He means: They guarded against God's threat, which He had sent down in His Book on the tongue of His Messenger, by voicing an apparent attestation 'of his veracity', just as someone who is

frightened protects himself against the noise of the thunderbolts by covering his ears and putting his fingers in them, thereby taking precautions.

We have mentioned the Tradition from Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās [452] . . . 'about' the hypocrites putting their fingers in their ears when they were attending Muḥammad's sessions. . . . If this is true—we do not know if it is true because the chain of transmission is questionable—then what has been narrated from them is correct. But if it is not true, the preferable interpretation of the verse is what we have said, because God has told us 'about the duplicity and doubt of the hypocrites' at the beginning of His narration about them, . . . and He describes them thus in all the verses of the Qur'ān in which He gives a description of them. It is the same in this verse. And God makes their putting their fingers in their ears a simile for their taking precautions concerning the Messenger of God and the believers as we have mentioned, just as someone who hears the noise of a thunderbolt takes precautions by putting his fingers in his ears. . . . Similarly, He has made his words « . . . fearful of death . . . » a simile for their fear and anxiety about the imminent descent of the devastating punishment with which they had been threatened, just as someone who hears the noise of a thunderbolt puts his fingers in his ears fearing that he will perish and die, that he will succumb to its violence.

(...)

Qatāda and Ibn Juraij [459, 463], have interpreted « . . . they put their fingers in their ears against the thunderbolts, fearful of death . . . » as a description by God of the hypocrites as anxious, faint-hearted, and loathing death, and they have interpreted as relevant to this His words: « They think every cry is against them. » (63: 4) But I do not think the matter is as they say. There were among 'the hypocrites' those whose bravery is not in doubt and whose courage is not repudiated, such as Quzmān² whose stature on 'the battlefield of' Uḥud was unequalled by any of the believers. Rather, they disliked attending assemblies with the Messenger of God, and turned from helping him against his enemies, because they had no perspicacity into their religion and did not accept the veracity of the Messenger of God. . . .

His words « . . . and God encompasses the unbelievers . . . » mean that He rounds them up and brings about His punishment of them.

⇒ Mujāhid:

He will round them up in Gehenna. [466, also 467]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

God will bring this down on them as retribution. [468]

Then He returned to the hypocrites' verbal attestation 'of belief', and informed 'us' about that, about them, and about their hypocrisy, completing the simile which He began to coin for them and their doubt, and the sickness of their hearts. He said « . . . the lightning . . . », meaning . . . their attestation, by verbal declaration, of the truth of God, His Messenger, and what he brought from their Lord. . . . « . . . wellnigh snatches away their sight . . . », i.e., sweeps it away, steals it, dazzles it with the brilliance of its illumination and the light of its shafts.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

It will dazzle their eyes, and it is not yet done. [469]

(...)

Then He said « . . . whenever it gives them light . . . » . . . , and He makes the lightning a simile for their belief.

¶ « . . . 'W'henver it gives them light . . . »—whenever belief shines forth for them . . . , 'because' they see in it the things of this world which please them: victory over enemies, the taking of booty in military expeditions, many conquests and the gains therefrom, fortune in possessions, physical well-being and security in their bodies, family and children; this is its shining on them. . . .—« . . . they walk in it . . . »—they walk in the light of the lightning . . . ; whenever they see in belief the things of this world which please them . . . , they keep to it and endure in it, just as the traveller walks on in the darkness of the night and the storm, which God has described, when a flash of lightning makes his way visible. . . .

The meaning of this 'growing dark' is that when the hypocrites did not see in Islam the things of their world that pleased them, when God tested the believers among His servants with adversity and tried them with calamities and afflictions—failures in their expeditions, victories therein to their enemies, reversal in their worldly fortunes—, they would establish their hypocrisy and keep to their errancy, just like the traveller in the rainstorm whom He describes; when it grows dark and the light of the lightning disappears, and he cannot find his way and looses his path.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LAW SHĀ'A 'LLĀHU
LA-DHAHABA BI-SAM'I-HIM WA-ABŞĀRI-HIM

‘God’ specified the ears and the eyes—that He would have taken them away from the hypocrites if He had wanted—and not the other parts of their bodies, because of what was previously mentioned ‘about these organs’ in these two verses. . . . He followed on this mention by ‘saying’ that if He had wanted He would have taken ‘these faculties’ away from the hypocrites as a punishment for their hypocrisy and unbelief, as a threat from God like His threat to them in the preceding verse when He said «. . . and God encompasses the unbelievers . . .». He thereby described Himself as having power over them, individually and as a group, to bring His displeasure to bear on them, to bring down His vengeance on them, thereby warning them of His force, making them fearful of His punishment, so that they might fear His might and hasten to Him with their repentance.

⇒ Ibn ‘Abbās:

«‘H’ad God willed, He would have taken away their hearing and their sight», because of the truth they had abandoned after coming to know it. [470]

(..)

§ Ṭabarī also replies to an objection about *sam’* (=hearing) being in the singular and *abşār* (=sight) being in the plural.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INNA 'LLĀHA
'ALĀ KULLI SHAI'IN
QADĪRUN

God attributes power over everything to Himself here because He is causing the hypocrites to fear His might and force. He informs them that He encompasses them, and that He has the power to take away their hearing and sight. Then He says: ‘O hypocrites, fear Me, and beware of My deceit and that of My Messenger and those who believe in Me, lest I bring down My vengeance upon you. Indeed I have power over this and ‘all’ other things.’ *Qadīr* means *qādir* (=powerful), just as *‘alīm* means *‘ālim* (=knowing), according to ‘the rule’ we have previously described whereby the form *fa’il*

‘*qadīr*, ‘*alīm*’ intensifies the praise or blame attached to the form *fa’il* ‘*qādir*, ‘*ālim*’.

¹ See above Exeg. 2: 17, p. 144.

² Quzmān was one of the warriors at the battle of Uhūd who fought on the side of the Prophet and killed many of the polytheists. The Prophet, however, considered him to be a denizen of hell, and, after the battle, severely wounded, Quzmān killed himself with an arrow, vindicating Muḥammad’s condemnation of him with the words: ‘I only fought for the honour of my people; but for that I should not have fought.’ (See Ibn Iṣḥāq (1955), pp. 383–4.)

2: 21

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

*yā-aiyuhā ‘l-nāsu ‘‘budū rabba-kumu ‘lladhī khalaqa-kum wa-‘lladhīna
min qabli-kum la‘alla-kum tattaqūna*

O you men, serve your Lord Who created you and those that
were before you, so that you might be God-fearing;

THE INTERPRETATION OF YĀ-AIYUHĀ 'L-NĀSU
'BUDŪ RABBA-KUMU 'LLADHĪ KHALAQA-KUM
WA-'LLADHĪNA MIN QABLI-KUM

‘GOD’ commanded the two groups of people, of one of which He said that it is the same for them whether they are warned or not—they will not believe, because of His seal on their hearts and hearing—, and of the other ‘He said’ that they would deceive God, and those who believe, by what they profess with their tongues—‘We believe in God and the Last Day’—despite their keeping secret something different from this, the sickness in their hearts, and their doubt about the truth of what they declare. ‘He also commanded’ others from among the rest of His creatures who are subject ‘to His commandments’, to surrender to Him in obedience, to assign lordship and worship exclusively to Him and not to idols, graven images, and gods. For He, exalted be His mention, is their Creator, and the Creator of their fathers and their forefathers before them, and the Creator of their idols, graven images, and gods. So He said to them: ‘He Who created you, and created your fathers and

forefathers, and the rest of creation apart from you—He is the Master of your loss and gain, more worthy to be obeyed than those who have no power over you for gain or for loss.

Ibn 'Abbās used to say the same about this, in what has been narrated to us from him, as we have said, except that he is quoted as having said about the meaning of «... serve your Lord...» 'that it meant' 'Declare God's oneness.' But we have already shown, in a previous part of this book of ours, that the meaning of 'serving' ('*ibāda*, = worship) is 'surrender to God in obedience, lowering oneself to Him in submission',¹ and what Ibn 'Abbās meant, God willing, by his interpretation... was: 'Render obedience and worship exclusively to your Lord and not to any other of His creatures.'

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

God has said «O you men, serve your Lord...» to the two groups of the unbelievers and the hypocrites together, i.e., 'Declare the oneness of your Lord, «Who created you and those that were before you».' [472]

(...)

This verse is one of the surest proofs of the error of those who say that the imposition 'by God' of what cannot be done without God's help is not permissible, unless God first gives help to the one who is obliged, in what he is obliged to do. For God has commanded those we have described to serve Him and to repent of unbelief in Him after He has told them that they will not believe and that they will not turn back from their errancy.

Argument
against the
Mu'tazilites

THE INTERPRETATION OF *LA'ALLA-KUM TATTAQŪNA*

The interpretation of this is: So that you might be God-fearing by worshipping your Lord Who created you, and by obeying Him in what He commanded you to do and in what He forbade you to do, and by rendering worship only to Him; so that you might fear lest His displeasure and wrath come down upon you, and might be among the God-fearing with whom their Lord is content.

(...)

§ The word *la'alla* may also carry the sense of 'perhaps', expressing doubt on the part of the speaker, but Ṭabarī, in an answer to an objection, says that it

cannot here imply any doubt on the part of God about what might happen if these hypocrites and unbelievers were to serve their Lord; it should rather be understood in this verse, he says, quoting an example from poetry, as meaning 'so that (you might)...'.

¹ See Exeg. 1: 4, pp. 68–9.

2: 22

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ
السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ فَلَا
تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

*alladhī ja'ala la-kumu 'l-arḍa firāshan, wa-'l-samā'a binā'an wa-anzala
mina 'l-samā'i mā'an fa-akhraja bi-hi mina 'l-thamarāti rizqan la-kum
fa-lā taj'alū li-'llāhi andādan wa-antum ta'lamūna*

Who assigned to you the earth for a place of repose, and the sky for a frame, and sent down out of the sky water, wherewith He brought forth fruits for your provision; so do not set up equals to God wittingly.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *ALLADHĪ JA'ALA LA-KUMU 'L-ARḌA FIRĀSHAN*

HIS words «... Who assigned to you the earth for a place of repose...» refer back to the first 'Who' in His words «... serve your Lord Who created you...»; they are both descriptive clauses relating to «your Lord». ... He meant by this: He has made the earth for you a levelled-out place (*mihād*),¹ a stable place in which to abide. Our Lord thereby reminded His servants of His blessings and favours towards them, so that they might remember His acts of generosity towards them and turn to obedience to Him. ...

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«Who assigned to you the earth for a place of repose (*firāsh*)...»,

and it is a spread² on which to walk, a levelled-out place, a stable abode. [475]

(..)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'L-SAMĀ'A BINĀ'AN

«In Arabic» the sky is called *samā'*³ because it is above the earth and the creatures who dwell therein; everything which is above something else is the *samā'* of that thing. That is why the roof of a house is called a *samāwa*, because it is over it, erected on top of it; and that is why, «as a verb, it expresses» . . . a man's being more noble than another.†

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

« . . . «And the sky for a frame . . .»; the frame of the sky over the earth is in the form of a dome, and it is a roof over the earth. [478.

⇒ Qatāda, 479, also describes it as a roof]

God mentioned the sky and the earth among the blessings He enumerated for «these people», because their nutriments, sustenance, and means of livelihood «came» from these two «sources», and this world of theirs is supported by both of them. He taught them that He Who created these two things, as well as all that is in them and the blessings «these people» enjoyed, is the One to Whom their obedience is due, the One to Whom they must give thanks and worship, not the graven images and idols, who can bring neither loss nor gain.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ANZALA MINA 'L-SAMĀ' I MĀ'AN FA-AKHRAJA BI-HI MINA 'L-THAMARĀTI RIZQAN LA-KUM

By this, God means that He causes the rain to fall from the sky, and with this rain brings forth provision, food, and nutriments for them from the crops and plants which they grow in the earth. He thereby informs them of His power and authority, . . . and that it is He who provides for them and feeds them, not those idols and gods they make His equals and peers. Then He rebukes them for setting up equals to Him, when they know that things are as He has informed them, that He has no equal nor peer, and that apart from Him they have no one who can bring them gain or loss, no creator, no provider.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-LĀ TAJ'ALŪ LI-'LLĀHI ANDĀDAN

Andād is the plural of *nidd*, which means an equal, a like.† And everything which is the like of something else, and similar to it, is its *nidd*.

(...)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, ⇒ A group of Companions:

«*Andād*» means: «Equals among men whom you follow in disobedience to God. [482]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

Al-andād are gods which they make equals to Him, and they attribute to them the like of what they attribute to Him. [483]

(..)

⇒ 'Ikrima:

«So do not set up equals to God . . .» by saying: «If it were not for our dog, thieves would enter our houses, if it were not for our dog barking in the house», and so on. [485]

God forbids them to associate anything with Him, to worship another than Him, or to take any equal to Him and obey him. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ANTUM TA'LAMŪNA

[T] «WITTINGLY»: FIRST OPINION: «Some said that» it means all the worshippers of idols, be they Arabs or unbelievers of the people of scripture.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

This was sent down concerning both the two groups of unbelievers and hypocrites. By «So do not set up equals to God wittingly» God meant: Do not associate with God any equal, who can bring no gain nor loss, when you know that you have no Lord who provides for you apart from Him. For you already know that the monotheism to which the Messenger calls you is the truth in which there is no doubt. [486]

⇒ Qatāda:

« . . . «Wittingly . . .», i.e., you know that God created you and

created the heavens and the earth, and then you set up equals to Him. [487]

SECOND OPINION: Some said that the people of the two scriptures are intended: the people of the Torah and the people of the Evangel.

⇒Mujāhid:

«So do not set up equals to God wittingly», 'i.e., knowing¹ that He is a single God in the Torah and the Evangel. [488, 489. See also, with a slightly different wording, 490]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: I assume that what prompted Mujāhid to give this interpretation, and to assign it as something addressed to the people of the Torah and the Evangel and not to anyone else, was his supposition that the Arabs did not know that God was their Creator and Provider, because they rejected the oneness of their Lord and associated 'partners' with him in worshipping others. But this is only an opinion. God, however, has said about them in His Book that they acknowledged His oneness, despite their associating the partners they associated 'with Him' in worshipping Him. He has said: «If you ask them: 'Who created you?', they will say: 'Allāh.'» (43: 87) And He has said: «Say: 'Who provides for you out of the sky and the earth, or who possesses hearing and sight, and who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and who directs the affair?' They will surely say: 'Allāh.' Then say: 'Will you not be God-fearing?'» (10: 31)

Since it was the case that the Arabs knew about the oneness of God, that He was the Originator of creation, their Creator, and Provider, as was the case with the people of the two scriptures, and since there is no indication in the verse that God meant by His saying «wittingly» either of the two parties, but rather that it is the generality of people, without exception, that are here being addressed, because He meant all the people when He said «O you men, serve your Lord . . .», then the preferable interpretation is that of Ibn 'Abbās and Qatāda, whereby He meant all those obligated 'by His commandments', who know of the oneness of God, that He has no partner in His creation, yet who associate another with Him in 'their' worship, irrespective of whether these people are Arabs or non-Arabs, literate or illiterate. Nevertheless, it was addressed to the unbelievers among the people of scripture who were around the abode of emigration (*dār al-hijra*, = Medina) of the

Messenger of God, and to the hypocrites among them, and to those among them who were polytheists and had gone over to hypocrisy when the Messenger of God arrived.⁴

¹ The 1st form verb *mahada* means 'to level or smooth out', *mihād*, which is derived from it, is 'somewhere which has been levelled, or smoothed over', having a meaning somewhat similar to the English garden 'bed'.

² *Firāsh*, something which is spread out on which to rest or repose. This can be something quite extensive, like a carpet, which is clearly what is meant in this Tradition, or something smaller which is spread out to rest or sleep on.

³ This word can also sometimes be translated as 'heaven'; the verb *samā* means 'to be above', 'to rise above'.

⁴ The traditional Islamic genealogy of one branch of the Arabs goes back to Ishmael (Ismā'īl), the son of Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and Hagar (Hājar). Abraham is described in the Qur'ān as a *muslim*, neither a Jew nor a Christian, nor a polytheist (3: 67), and to Abraham and Ishmael is attributed the founding of the Ka'ba. Many of the Meccan ritual sites are associated with Ishmael and his mother. The descendants of Ishmael were thus originally believers in the one God, and it was only through deviation that they came to worship many gods. For this reason they are described as having been, during the Jāhiliya, *mushrikūn* (= those who associate partners with God), and when this term is translated as 'polytheists', as it is here, its more literal meaning of 'associators' should always be borne in mind.

2: 23

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ
وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

*wa-in kuntum fī raibin mim-mā nazzal-nā 'alā 'abdi-nā fa-'tū bi-sūratin
min mithli-hi wa-'d'ū shuhadā'a-kum min dūni 'llāhi in kuntum
ṣādiqīna*

And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down to Our servant, then bring a sura from the like of it, and call on your assistants apart from God, if you speak the truth.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IN KUNTUM FĪ RAIBIN
MIM-MĀ NAZZAL-NĀ 'ALĀ 'ABDI-NĀ
FA-'TŪ BI-SŪRATIN MIN MITHLI-HI

THIS is a vindication by God of His Prophet, Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, against the polytheist Arabs of his people and the hypocrites among them, as well as against the unbelievers among the people of scripture and those of them who

erred. 'It was these latter¹ with whose story He began His words: «As for the believers, alike it is to them whether you have warned them or have not warned them . . .». It is these 'groups'¹ whom He addresses with these verses, and it is those like them whom He means by 'what He says in¹ them.

¶ 'If you, O polytheist Arabs and unbelievers among the people of scripture, are in doubt about the light, the clear demonstration, and the verses of the Furqān which We have sent down to Our servant, Muḥammad, that it is from Me, that it is I who have sent it down to him, and you do not believe in it, and do not attest his truthfulness in what he says, then produce a proof that will refute his proof. For you know that everyone who has prophethood proves the truth of his claim to it by producing a demonstration, the like of which no creature is able to produce.

'Part of Muḥammad's proof for the truth of what he says, of his demonstration that his prophethood is genuine and that what he brought is from Me, is the inability of all of you, and of all your aiders and abettors whom you ask to help you in this, to bring a sura from the like of it. Since you are unable to 'do¹ this, although you have great eloquence, rhetorical skill, and articulateness, you know that everyone else must be even less capable of doing what you are unable to do in this 'respect¹. This 'proof¹ is 'therefore¹ just like the signs which were the demonstration of the truthfulness of each of My preceding Messengers and Prophets, the proof of each one's prophethood, the like of which all of My creatures were unable to produce.

'You should thus be quite sure now that Muḥammad did not fabricate lies or concoct falsehoods, because, if this 'Revelation¹ was his lies and fabrications, you and all My creatures would not be incapable of producing something like it. For Muḥammad is merely a man like yourselves, and in the same condition as you are with respect to his physical body, dispositional abilities, and articulateness in language; so how could it be supposed that he is capable of that of which you are incapable? How could it be imagined that you are incapable of that of which he is capable?'

[T]: « THEN BRING A SURA FROM THE LIKE OF IT »

⇒Qatāda:

«'T¹hen bring a sura from the like of it» means: from the like of

this Qur'ān in truth and veracity, with no falsehood in it and no lies. [491, also 492]

⇒Mujāhid:

«'T¹hen bring a sura from the like of it», the like of the Qur'ān. [493, 494; also 495]

The meaning of the views of Mujāhid and Qatāda which we have quoted is that God said to those unbelievers who disputed with Him concerning His Prophet, Muḥammad: 'Then produce a sura from the like of this Qur'ān in your speech, O Arabs, like that which Muḥammad brought in your language, and with the meanings of your way of speaking.'

§ Ṭabarī then quotes, and rejects, an anonymous opinion that « *min mithli-hi* » means 'from the like of him', i.e., 'from the like of Muḥammad'. This opinion exploits the ambiguity in the meaning of the suffixed masculine pronoun *-hi*: it could refer either to a thing or to a person.

OBJECTION: You state that, by His words «then bring a sura from the like of it», God means 'from the like of the Qur'ān'. But does the Qur'ān have a like, such that this . . . could be said 'of it'?

REPLY: He does not mean by this: 'Produce a sura from the like of it in composition and meaning', by which it is distinguished from all other speech besides it. He means: 'Produce a sura from the like of it in eloquence (*bayān*)',¹ because God sent down the Qur'ān in the Arabic language, and there is no doubt that the speech of the Arabs is like it, in the sense of 'being¹ Arabic. But in the sense in which the Qur'ān is distinguished from the rest of the speech of mankind 'i.e., from non-Arabic languages¹, it has no like—nothing comparable, nothing similar.

God only vindicated His Prophet to them . . . through the Qur'ān, since the inability of 'this¹ group to produce a sura from its likeness in eloquence was evident; for the Qur'ān was a discourse like their discourse, a speech sent down in their language. So He said to them: 'If you are in doubt as to whether the recitation (*qur'ān*) I have sent down to My servant is 'actually¹ from Me, then produce a sura from your speech which is like it in being Arabic, for you are Arab; it is a discourse like your discourse, a speech like your speech.'

God did not oblige them to produce a sura in a language which was not like that in which the Qur'ān was sent down, for they could have

said: 'You have assigned us ¹to produce something in a language¹ which, if we were conversant with it, we would produce, but we cannot produce it because we are not of the people of the language in which you commissioned us to produce it. So You have no proof against us, because, although we are unable to produce the like of it in languages other than ours, because we do not speak them, there are many people who speak other languages than ours who can produce the like of it in the language in which you commissioned us to produce it.' Instead, He said to them: 'Produce a sura from what is like it, because your language is like it among languages. Now, if Muḥammad had fabricated and forged ¹the Qur'ān¹, and if you were to come together and help each other to produce the like of one of its suras in your language and discourse, you would be more able to fabricate it, to piece it together and compose it, than Muḥammad. And even if you were not more able to do it than he, you would not be unable to do what Muḥammad was able to do, since you are a group and he is on his own. . . .'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'D'Ū SHUHADĀ'A-KUM
MIN DŪNI 'LLĀHI IN KUNTUM ṢĀDIQĪNA

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«¹A¹nd call on your *shuhadā'* apart from God», i.e., your helpers in what you are about, «if you speak the truth.» [496]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

Mujāhid said, concerning «and call on your *shuhadā'*»: 'People who will be your witnesses.' Your witnesses (*shuhadā'*) to it, if you produce it—the like of it, the like of the Qur'ān. [500; also, 497, 498, 499]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: This is what God said to those unbelievers who had doubts about what Muḥammad brought.

Ud'ū (= call on) ¹here¹ means 'ask for help', 'seek aid'. ‡ *Shuhadā'* is the plural of *shahīd*, . . . and *shahīd* is the noun for the person who testifies (*shāhid*, = witness) that something belongs to someone else by verifying ¹this other person's¹ claim, and it is also the noun for someone who attends (*mushāhid*) something ¹in the sense of begin present¹. . . .

The preferred interpretation of the verse is that which Ibn 'Abbās said, which was that it meant: 'Call for aid, in your production of a sura from the like of it, on your helpers and assistants who attend you and help you to deceive God and the believers, who back you in your unbelief and hypocrisy. If your repudiation, that what Muḥammad brought you was a fabrication and a forgery, is correct, then put yourselves and the others to the test: Can you produce a sura from the like of it, so that ¹it would then be a possibility that¹ Muḥammad had fabricated all of it by himself?'

However, what Mujāhid and Ibn Juraij said in interpreting this has no validity, because the people at the time of the Messenger of God were ¹divided¹ into three categories: the people of true belief, the people of real unbelief, and the hypocrites between them. The people of belief believed in God and His Messenger, and the unbelievers could not have claimed that they had witnesses (*shuhadā'*) among the believers to the genuineness of what they would bring if they were to bring a fabrication of the Message and then claim that it was a likeness of the Qur'ān. And there is no doubt that if the people of hypocrisy and unbelief were called upon to say that what is false is true or that what is true is false, they would hurry to do it with their unbelief and errancy, ¹and so would not be credible witnesses,¹ so from which of the¹se¹ two groups would their witnesses come if they were to claim they had produced a sura from the like of the Qur'ān?

This is like where He said «Say: 'If men and jinn banded together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they would never produce its like, even though they backed one another.'» (17: 88) In this verse, He announces that the jinn and mankind will not bring the like of the Qur'ān even if they back one another and help each other to bring it. So He challenges them, in the sense of a rebuke, in ¹the present verse¹ . . . , by which He means: If you are in doubt about the truthfulness of Muḥammad concerning what he brought you from Me that it is from Me, produce a sura from the like of it; and let some of you ask others for aid in this if you are right in your claim, so that you might know, if you are unable to do it, that neither Muḥammad, nor any single person, could produce it, and might verify for yourselves that it is what I sent down, My Revelation, to My servant.

¹ See Intro. pp. 9–11.

2: 24

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا
النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

*fa-in lam taf'alū wa-lan taf'alū fa-'ttaqu 'l-nāra 'llatī waqūdu-ha
'l-nāsu wa-'l-ḥijāratu u'iddat li-'l-kāfirīna*

And if you do not—and you never will—then fear the Fire,
whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the unbelievers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-IN LAM TAF'ALŪ WA-LAN TAF'ALŪ*

¶ If you do not produce a sura from the like of it, although you back each other, you and your partners in it, and your helpers, then it will be evident to you, through your experiment and examination, that you and all My creatures are unable to do it, and you will know that it is from Me. Yet you will persist in denying it, . . . 'and' you will never produce a sura from the like of it.

⇒ Qatāda:

«And if you do not—and you never will—», i.e., you are unable to 'do' this, you do not have the capability for it. [501]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«And if you do not—and you never will—», He has made the truth clear to you. [502]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-'TTAQU 'L-NĀRA 'LLATĪ WAQŪDU-HA 'L-NĀSU WA-'L-ḤIJĀRATU*

¶ Then fear that you will be roasted in the Fire for giving My Messenger the lie for 'having said' that what he brought you from Me was My Revelation and sent down by Me, after you had found out that it was My Book, and from Me, and after the proof that it was My Speech and Revelation had been established against you through your inability, and that of all My creatures, to produce the like of it.

Then He describes the Fire whose blaze He warns them about, telling them that men are its fuel, and stones are its fuel. . . .

OBJECTION: How is it that stones are mentioned specifically along with men, that they are made fuel of the Fire of Gehenna?

REPLY: They are stones of sulphur, which have the strongest heat of any stone, according to what I have been told, when they are ignited.

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd:

They are stones made of sulphur which God created in the heaven of this world on the day He created the heavens and the earth. He has prepared them for the unbelievers. [503, also 504]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«'Then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones'; as for the stones, they are stones in the Fire made of black sulphur, with which they are tormented. [505]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd:

They are stones which God makes Himself as and how He wants. [506]

(. . .)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *U'IDDAT LI-'L-KĀFIRĪNA*

We have already shown in this book of ours that in the speech of the Arabs a *kāfir* is someone who covers something with a veil.¹ God calls the unbeliever '*kāfir*' because he denies the benefits He 'bestows' on him, and draws a veil over the blessings 'with which' He 'favours' him.

¶ The Fire is prepared for those who deny that Allāh is their sole Lord in the creation of them and those who came before, Who made the earth a place of repose for them, and the sky a frame, Who sent down water from the sky thereby producing fruits as a provision for them; 'it is for' those who associate equals and gods with Him in worship of Him, although He is their only Originator, their sole Nourisher and Provider.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

« . . . prepared for the unbelievers », i.e., for those who are engaged in unbelief as you are. [508]

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 6, p. 107.

2:25

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ
تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ
رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا
وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

*wa-bashshiri 'lladhīna āmanū wa-'amilu 'l-ṣāliḥāti anna la-hum
jannātin tajrī min taḥti-ha 'l-anhāru kulla-mā ruziqū min-hā min
thamaratin rizqan qālū hādha 'lladhī ruziqnā min qablu wa-utū bi-hi
mutashābihan wa-la-hum fī-hā azwājun muṭahharatun wa-hum fī-hā
khālidūna*

Give good tidings to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, that for them await gardens underneath which rivers flow; whenever they are given a fruit therefrom as provision they shall say: 'This is what we were provided with before'; they shall be given it, each resembling the other; and there for them shall be purified wives; therein they shall abide forever.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-BASHSHIRI 'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ

WA-'AMILU 'L-ṢĀLIḤĀTI

ANNA LA-HUM JANNĀTIN TAJRĪ MIN TAḤTI-HA 'L-ANHĀRU

His words «Give good tidings . . .» mean 'Inform them . . .'. *Bashshara* means to bring news by which the receiver is gladdened, when 'the bringer' precedes with it every other bringer. This is a command from God to His Prophet, Muḥammad, to announce His good tidings to 'those of' mankind who believe in Him, and in Muḥammad and what he brought from his Lord, and who attest this belief and affirmation of theirs by their righteous deeds.

¶ 'O Muḥammad, give good tidings to him who believes that you are truly My Messenger, and that the guidance and light which you

brought is truly from Me, and to him who puts his verbal attestation of this truth into practice through the righteous performance of 'those' deeds which I have imposed on him and laid down as obligations for him in My Book through your tongue. 'Tell him' that gardens underneath which rivers flow 'are reserved' especially for him, to the exclusion of anyone who gives you the lie, denies that the guidance which you brought was from Me, and opposes you, and of anyone who apparently attests belief in you, and verbally affirms that what you brought is from Me, but who disavows this in his 'real' beliefs and does not put it into practice through his deeds: for them, the Fire whose fuel is men and stones awaits, prepared, with Me.'

Jannāt is the plural of *janna*, which means 'garden' (*bustān*). By His mention of the garden, God means the trees, fruits, and plants in the garden, not the ground. That is why He has said « . . . underneath which rivers flow », because it is clear that He wanted to say that the water of the rivers therein flowed under the trees, plants, and fruits, not under the ground. For when water flows under the ground, it is not the lot of someone above it to see it unless the cover between it and him is removed. According to the description of the rivers of the Garden, they do not flow in underground channels.

⇒ Abū 'Ubaida:

Masrūq said: 'The date-palms of the Garden are covered from bottom to top with layer upon layer 'of flowers and fruit', their fruit is like large jars; whenever a fruit is picked another comes in its place. The water of 'the Garden' does not flow in an underground channel.' [509, also 510 and 511]

If it is like this, with the rivers of 'the Garden' not flowing in underground channels, there can be no doubt that what is meant by 'gardens' is the trees of the gardens, their plants and fruit, and not the ground, since the rivers flow above ground but under the plants and trees, according to what Masrūq mentions. This description of the Garden is preferable to 'saying' that its rivers flow under the ground.

By means of this verse God motivates His servants towards belief, and animates them to worship of Him, by informing them of what He has prepared near Him for the people who obey Him and believe in Him, just as He has warned them in the previous verse by warning them of the punishment He has prepared for those who disbelieve in Him, those who set up gods and equals with Him, for associating others

with Him and defying His punishment by being disobedient to Him and abandoning obedience.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KULLA-MĀ RUZIQŪ MIN-HĀ
MIN THAMARATIN RIZQAN QĀLŪ HĀDHA 'LLADHĪ RUZIQNĀ
MIN QABLU WA-UTŪ BI-HI MUTASHĀBIHAN*

By His words «whenever they are given therefrom», He means 'from the gardens', . . . or rather the meaning is 'from¹ its trees'. It is as if He were to say: Whenever they are given a fruit as provision from the trees of the orchards which God has prepared in His gardens for those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, they say: 'This is what we were provided with before.'

[T]: « 'THIS IS WHAT WE WERE PROVIDED WITH BEFORE' »: FIRST INTERPRETATION: Some said that it should be interpreted as: 'This is what we were provided with before this in the lower world.'

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

They are given fruit in the Garden, and when they see it they say: 'This is what we were provided with in the lower world.' [512. See also ⇒ Qatāda, 513; ⇒ Mujāhid, 514 and 515; Ibn Zaid, 516]

SECOND OPINION: Others said rather that the interpretation is: 'This is the fruit of the Garden we were provided with before', because these 'fruits¹' markedly resemble each other in colour and savour. By way of a reason, those who held this opinion 'said¹' that whenever one of the fruits of the Garden is picked, another comes in its place.

⇒ Abū 'Ubaida:

The date-palms of the Garden are covered from bottom to top with layer upon layer 'of flowers and fruit¹', their fruit is like large jars; whenever a fruit is picked another comes in its place. [517; compare 509]

They said that 'the fruits¹' resemble each other to the inhabitants of the Garden because the one which replaces is similar to the one which was picked and eaten in all respects. It is because of this, they say, that God has said «they shall be given it in resemblance», because 'the fruits¹' all resemble each other in every respect.

THIRD OPINION: And some said that the reason they say «'This is

what we were provided with before' » is rather that 'the fruit¹' resembles what was before in colour, but differs from it in savour.

⇒ Al-Awzā'i:

Yahyā b. Abī Kathīr said: 'One of them is given a bowl 'of fruit¹' from which he eats. Then he is given another, and he says: "This is the one we were given before." Then the angel says: "Eat. The colour is the same, but the savour is different."' [518]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: This 'latter¹' interpretation is one view about the explanation of the verse, but the ostensive reading does not sustain it. The view which the ostensive sense of the verse indicates and confirms is that of those who said that the meaning is: 'This is what we were provided with before in the lower world.' . . . 'When God said that¹ they say: «'This is what we were provided with before'», He did not specify that they say this about one 'fruit¹' rather than another. Since He said that they say this about every fruit they are provided with, there can be no doubt that they say this about the first provision of fruit they are given after entering the Garden and settling down there, before which they will have had none of its fruit. Since there can be no doubt that this is what they say at the beginning 'of their abiding in the Garden¹' as well as what they say in the middle of 'their stay¹' and 'the period that¹' follows, it is clear that they cannot possibly say of the first provision of fruit from the Garden: 'This is the fruit which we were provided with before.' . . .

It is clear from what we have explained that the meaning of the verse is: Whenever those who believe and do deeds of righteousness are given one of the fruits of the Garden as provision, they say: 'This is what we were provided with in the lower world.'

OBJECTION: How can these people say «'This is what we were provided with before' » when what they were provided with before was lost when they ate it? How can the people of the Garden say something which is not true?

REPLY: The matter is not as you suppose concerning this. The meaning is: This is the same kind of fruit and provision as we were provided with before this. This is like a man who says to another: 'I have prepared such-and-such a dish for you . . .', and the person addressed says: 'This is my food at home', meaning by this that the kind of food which his friend has said he has prepared for him is his food 'at

home¹, not that the actual dish he says he has prepared for him is his food 'there'. This would be something which no one hearing him say it could possibly imagine that he meant, because it conflicts with the context within which it is spoken, and every person's speech is oriented towards what is well known among the people in its context not to what is unknown in its meanings. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-UTŪ BI-HI MUTASHĀBIHAN*

The pronoun 'it' . . . refers back to the provision, so it means: They shall be given the fruit of 'the Garden' they are provided with, each resembling the other.

[T]: « RESEMBLING »: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that the resemblance is that all of 'the provision' is the choicest, and that there is nothing vile in it [⇒Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 519 to 521; ⇒Qatāda, 522; ⇒Ibn Juraij, 523].

SECOND OPINION: And some said that the resemblance is in colour, while there is a difference in savour [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 524; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 527; ⇒Mujāhid, 528].

THIRD OPINION: And some said that the resemblance is in the colour and the savour [⇒Mujāhid, 530; ⇒Mujāhid and Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd, 531].

FOURTH OPINION: Some said that the resemblance is the resemblance of the fruit of the Garden to the fruit of the lower world in colour, although there is a difference in savour [⇒Qatāda, 532; ⇒'Ikrima, 533].

FIFTH OPINION: And some said that nothing in the Garden has any similarity with anything in the lower world except in name [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 534 and 535; ⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid, 536].

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most preferable of these interpretations of the verse is that of those who said: They shall be given it, each resembling the other with respect to colour and appearance, but differing in savour. That is to say, the fruit of the Garden and the fruit of this world resemble each other in appearance and colour, but differ

from each other in savour and taste, for the same reason as we have given previously in the interpretation of «whenever they are given a fruit therefrom as provision they shall say: 'This is what we were provided with before'». . . . They differ in savour and taste. Thus there is no like in this world for any of these things in the Garden.

§ Ṭabarī argues against those who are of the opinion that this clause refers to a resemblance between the various fruits of the Garden, using an extended dialectical argument of the same kind as he used in the discussion of 2: 7 (p.111). These adversaries are made to say that there can surely be no resemblance between the fruit of the Garden and that of this world in any respect. Then Ṭabarī asks if they do not have the same names. If they say no, they contradict the Qur'ān, e.g., 55: 68; if they say yes, they contradict themselves. He then quotes the following Tradition.

⇒'Abū Mūsā' al-Ash'arī:

When God exiled Adam from the Garden, He gave him fruit from the Garden as provision. He taught him the husbandry of all things, so these fruits of yours are from the fruits of the Garden. The former, however, change, while the latter do not. [537]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-HUM FĪ-HĀ AZWĀJUN MUṬAHHARATUN*

The pronoun 'them' refers to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, and 'there' means 'in the gardens'. The interpretation of this is: Give good tidings to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness that they shall have gardens in which are purified wives (*azwāj*). *Azwāj* is the plural of *zawj*, which is a man's wife. . . . The interpretation of «*muṭahharatun*» is that they are purified from all the defilement, pollution, and 'things provoking' doubt 'about purity' which are 'to be found' in the women inhabitants of this world: menses, childbirth, feces, urine, snot, saliva, and sperm (*manīy*),¹ and similar defilement, uncleanness, doubt, and unpleasantness.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd; and ⇒A group of Companions:

The purified wives do not menstruate, defecate, or hawk up. [538]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

They are purified from uncleanness and defilement. [539]

⇒Mujāhid:

They do not urinate, defecate, secrete pre-seminal fluids (*yamdhīna*), release semen, or menstruate. [541, also 540, 542-4, and ⇒Abū 'Āṣim, 545]

⇒Qatāda:

«¹And there for them shall be purified wives». Yes, by God, ¹purified¹ from sin and defilement. [546, also 547]

⇒Qatāda:

Purified from menses, pregnancy, and defilement. [548]

(. .)

⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zaid:

A purified woman is one who does not menstruate. The women of this world are not purified; do you not see them bleeding and having to leave out prayer and fasting ¹when they are menstruating, for example¹? Thus¹, i.e., purified,¹ was Eve created; then she disobeyed, and, when she disobeyed, God said: 'I created you purified, and I will ¹now¹ cause you to bleed as you caused this tree to bleed.'² [550]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-HUM FĪ-HĀ KHĀLIDŪNA

¶ Those who believe and do deeds of righteousness will abide forever in the gardens. . . . Their eternal abiding therein is the perpetuity of their remaining therein in the state of everlasting joy and felicity which God bestows upon them.

¹ Islamic Tradition speaks of both male and female sperm.

² See the Traditions below, *Exeg.* 2: 35 and 36, about the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden.

2: 26

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا
فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ
كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

*inna 'llāha lā yastahyī an yaḍriba mathalan mā ba'ūdatan fa-mā
fauqa-hā fa-amma 'lladhīna āmanū fa-ya'lamūna anna-hu 'l-ḥaqqu
min rabbi-him wa-amma 'lladhīna kafarū fa-yaqūlūna mādhā arāda
'llāhu bi-hādhā mathalan yuḍillu bi-hi kathīran wa-yahdī bi-hi
kathīran wa-mā yuḍillu bi-hī illa 'l-fāsiqīna*

God is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat or aught above it. As for the believers, they know it is the truth from their Lord; but as for the unbelievers, they say: 'What did God intend by this as a similitude?' Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many; and thereby He leads none astray save the ungodly.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INNĀ 'LLĀHU LĀ YASTHYĪ AN YAḌRIBA MATHALAN-MĀ BA'ŪDATAN FA-MĀ FAUQA-HĀ

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions:

When God coined these two similitudes for the hypocrites, i.e., His words «¹the likeness of them is as the likeness of a man who kindled a fire» (2: 17-18), and His words «. . . or as a downpour from the sky» (2: 19-20)—the three verses—the hypocrites said: 'God is too exalted and sublime to coin these two similitudes.' So God sent down: «God is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat. . . . They shall be the losers.» [554]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, concerning His words «God is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat»:

God coins this likeness for 'the life of' this world: the gnat lives as long as it is hungry, and when it is full of drink it dies. This is the likeness of these people for whom God coins this similitude in the Qur'ān: when they are full of this world, satiated with drink, God takes them at that moment. Then he recited: «So, when they forgot what they had been reminded of, We opened unto them the gates of everything, until, when they rejoiced in what they were given, We seized them suddenly, and behold, they were sore confounded.» (6: 44) [555, also 556]

THIRD OPINION

⇒Qatāda:

«God is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat or aught above it», i.e., God is not ashamed of the truth, to mention something of it, however great or small. When God mentioned flies (22: 73) and the spider (29: 41), the people of errancy said: 'What does God mean by the mention of this?' So God sent down: «God is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat or aught above it.» [557, also 558]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: All those whose views about this verse, and about the meaning in which it was sent down, we have mentioned express 'valid' opinions, but the most preferable of these, for correctness and being nearest to the truth, is the opinion we have quoted from Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās. For God informed His servants that He «is not ashamed to coin a similitude, be it a gnat or aught above it», following on the similitudes coming before in this sura which He coined for the hypocrites, and not those He coined in the other suras besides this one; because it is more suitable and preferable that these words . . . should be a reply to the repudiation of the unbelievers and hypocrites of the similitudes He coined for them in this sura, than that they should be a reply to their repudiation of the similitudes He coined for them in other suras.

§ The objection is raised that this must be a reply to them for the similitudes He coined elsewhere in the Qur'ān, because of the similarity between the exempla: gnats, flies, and spiders. Ṭabarī counters this by maintaining that the

intention behind these words of God is merely to repudiate the idea that anything might be too big or too small for God to use to guide the believers and lead the unbelievers astray [see ⇒Mujāhid, 559–61]. The reason for using the figure of the gnat is that it is the smallest and weakest of creatures [see ⇒Qatāda, 562; ⇒Ibn Jurajj, 563]. To the further objection that there is no evidence for the hypocrite's rejection of the similitudes, Ṭabarī replies that the evidence is in the rest of the verse, «As for the believers . . ., but as for the unbelievers, they say: 'What did God intend by this as a similitude?」 By the unbelievers here are meant the hypocrites.

(...)

The interpretation of His words «or aught above it» is, in my view, 'or aught that is greater than it', because of what we quoted earlier from Qatāda and Ibn Jurajj about the gnat being the weakest of God's creatures, and since it is the weakest of God's creatures it is the ultimate in smallness and weakness. Since this is the case, there can be no doubt that whatever is above the weakest creature can only be stronger than it. The meaning must therefore be, according to what these two have said, 'or aught above it in greatness and size'.

It is also said, concerning the interpretation of His words «*fa-mā fauqa-hā*», 'that they mean 'or aught more than that' in smallness'. This is like someone who mentions a man and ascribes miserliness and stinginess to him, then the person who hears 'him say this' says: 'Indeed, and more than that (*fauqa dhālik*)!', meaning 'more miserly and stingy' than he had described him. But this goes against the interpretation of the scholars whose knowledge of interpretation of the Qur'ān is approved.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-AMMA 'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ*
FA-YA 'LAMŪNA ANNA-HU 'L-ḤAQQU MIN RABBI-HIM
WA-AMMA 'LLADHĪNA KAFARŪ FA-YAQŪLŪNA
MĀDHĀ ARĀDA 'LLĀHU BI-HĀDHĀ MATHALAN

By His words «As for the believers» God means 'As for those who attest to the truth of God and His Messenger'; and 'by' His words «they know it is the truth from their Lord» He means: 'they know that the similitude which God coins is a 'true' similitude for what He coins it for.'

⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

«'T'hey know that it is the truth from their Lord», that this

similitude is the truth from their Lord, and that it is the Speech of God and is from Him. [564. See also a similar Tradition ⇒ Qatāda, 565]

By His words «but as for the unbelievers» He means those who reject the signs of God and deny what they know, who conceal what they know to be true. This describes the hypocrites, and it is these whom God means in this verse, as well as those who are their peers and partners from the people of scripture and others.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF YUḌILLU BI-HĪ KATHĪRAN
WA-YAHDĪ BI-HĪ KATHĪRAN

By his words «¹thereby he leads many astray», He means 'thereby He leads astray many of His creatures'; «thereby» refers to the quoting of the similitude. This is the beginning of a new sentence from God,¹ and the meaning is: God leads many of the hypocrites and unbelievers astray by the similitude He coins—

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«Thereby He leads many astray»: He means 'the hypocrites';

«thereby He guides many»: He means 'the believers'. [567]

—Thus He adds errancy to their errancy for them, because of their denial of what they knew, as certain truth, from the similitude which God coined for whatever He coined it for, and ¹because of their denial of their knowledge¹ that it was apposite for whatever He coined it for. This is God's leading them astray thereby. And «thereby He guides», i.e., ¹by¹ the similitude, «many» of the people of belief and attestation. He adds guidance to their guidance for them, belief to their belief, because they attest and aver the truth of what they know, as certain truth, to be apposite for whatever God coins it as a similitude for. This is guidance thereby from God to them.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ YUḌILLU BI-HI
ILLA 'L-FĀSIQĪNA

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«¹And thereby He leads none astray save the ungodly»; they are

the hypocrites. [568, the continuation of 567. See also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 570]

The original meaning of *fiṣq* in the speech of the Arabs is 'to go out of, or depart from, something'. One uses the verb for a fresh, ripe date when it bursts through its skin, and one calls a mouse *fuwaisiq* because it pops out of its hole. This is why the hypocrites and unbelievers are called *fāsiqūn*, because they have departed from obedience to their Lord. This is why God says, when describing Iblīs, «... save Iblīs; he was one of the jinn and committed ungodliness (*fasaqa*) against his Lord's command» (18: 50), meaning by this 'he departed from obedience to Him and compliance with His command.'

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«... ¹F¹or their ungodliness» (2: 59), i.e., 'for their going far from My command'. [571]

¶ And God leads none astray by the similitude which He coins for the people of errancy and hypocrisy, except those who depart from obedience to Him, and those among the people of scripture who disbelieve in Him who have ceased to follow His command, and the hypocrites who have erred.

¹ This, as opposed to an unscrubed claim that it forms part of a sentence with the preceding words of the hypocrites.

2: 27

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا
أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْخَاسِرُونَ

*alladhīna yanquḍūna 'ahda 'llāhi min ba'di mīthāqi-hī wa-yaqṭa'ūna
mā amara 'llāhu bi-hī an yūṣala wa-yufsidūna fi 'l-arḍi ulā'ika humu
'l-khāsirūna*

such as break the covenant of God after its solemn binding, and
such as sever what God has commanded should be joined, and
such as work corruption in the land—they shall be the losers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ALLADHĪNA YANQUḌŪNA
'AHDA 'LLĀHI MIN BA'DI MĪTHĀQI-HI

THIS is a description by God of the ungodly (*fāsiqūn*), of whom He has said that none but they will be led astray by the similitude He coined for the hypocrites. . . .

[T]: « COVENANT »: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that it is God's decree (*waṣīya*) to His creatures, His commanding them to obey Him and His forbidding them to disobey Him, 'which He has given' in His Books and through the tongue of His Messenger. Their breaking this was their departure from acting in accordance with it.

SECOND OPINION: Others said that these verses descended concerning the unbelievers and hypocrites among the people of scripture. It is these He meant by His words «As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether you have warned them . . .», and by His words «And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'». Everything which is in these verses, up to the end of the narration about them, is a reproof of them, a rebuke. The^{se} scholars¹ said that the covenant of God which they broke after it had been made solemnly binding was 'the obligation' imposed upon them by God in the Torah to act according to what is in it, to follow Muḥammad

when he was sent forth, and to attest to the truthfulness of him and of what he brought from their Lord. Their breaking of this was their repudiation of it after they had known it to be true, their denial of it, and their concealment of knowledge about it from the people after they had solemnly bound themselves before God that they would indeed expound it to the people and not conceal it. So God says that «they cast it away behind their backs and thereby acquired a paltry return.» (3: 187)

THIRD OPINION: Some of them said that by this verse God meant all the people of polytheism, unbelief, and hypocrisy. His covenant with all of them concerning His monotheism was the clear demonstrations of His Lordship that He gave them, and His covenant with them concerning His command and prohibition was the miracles He presented as proofs for His Messengers, miracles the like of which none but them had been able to bring, and which were testimony for 'the people' of truthfulness. 'These authorities' said that their breaking of it was their ceasing to affirm that whose truth had been made clear to them through 'these' proofs, and their repudiation of the Messengers and the scriptures, despite their knowledge that what they had brought was true.

FOURTH OPINION: Others said that the covenant which God mentions is the covenant which He took from them when He brought them forth from Adam's loins, which He describes in His words: «And when your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify about themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes, we testify'—lest you should say on the day of the Resurrection: 'As for us, we were heedless of this', or lest you say: 'Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, will You then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?'" (7: 172-3) Their breach of this was their failure to fulfil it.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: In my view, the most preferable opinion for correctness concerning this 'covenant', is that of him who said that these verses were sent down concerning the unbelieving Jewish rabbis who were present in the abode of emigration¹, Medina,¹ of the Messenger of God, and those closest to it of the rest of the Children of Israel, as well as the hypocrites who remained polytheists of whom we have already given a clear account in this book of ours.

We have already shown that God's words «As for the unbelievers, alike it is for them . . .» and «And some men there are who say: 'We

believe in God and the Last Day'» were sent down concerning the 'se Jewish rabbis', and those who followed the same course as they did in associating 'others' with God. In my view, however, although these verses descended concerning the 'se people', their meaning covers all those who followed the same course of errancy as they did: by that part of them which is particularly appropriate to the description of the hypocrites, all hypocrites are meant, and by that part of them appropriate to the unbelievers among the Jewish rabbis, all those similar to them in their unbelief are meant.

Sometimes God generalizes 'His' description to cover all of them, as when He first mentions all of them at the beginning of the verses which give an account of them; and sometimes He specifically restricts 'His' description to some of them, as when He makes a distinction between their two factions, i.e., the faction of the hypocrites drawn from the idol-worshippers and those who associated 'others' with God, and the faction of the unbelievers drawn from the Jewish rabbis. Those who broke God's covenant were those who refrained from affirming 'the truth' of Muḥammad and what he brought, and making his prophethood clear to the people as God had imposed on them, those who concealed the explanation of this after knowing it 'was true' and 'after knowing' what God had imposed on them in this matter. 'This is' as God has said, «And when God took a solemn undertaking from those who had been given the scripture: 'You shall make it clear to the people, and not conceal it.' But they cast it away behind their backs» (3: 167): their casting it behind their backs was their breaking of the covenant which they were committed to in the Torah as we have described, and their failure to act in accordance with it.

I say that He refers to 'these learned Jews' in these verses because these verses descended concerning them, from the beginning of the five or six 'first' verses of the sura of the Cow up to the completion of the narration about them. And in the verse which comes after the report about the creation of Adam, and 'in' His statement where He says: «O Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and fulfil My covenant, and I shall fulfil your covenant» (2: 40), and in His addressing them specifically, and not the rest of mankind, about fulfilling this 'covenant', 'in all this' is evidence that those who are meant by His words «such as break the covenant of God after its solemn binding» are the unbelievers and hypocrites among them, and those who were their partisans in errancy among the polytheist idol-worshippers. Although 'this verse' is addressed to those of the two

factions I have described, all those who follow their path and way, from among all the men and 'all' the kinds of communities to whom the command and the prohibition are addressed, are included in the judgements against them and in the threat, censure, and rebuke which God has imposed on them.

¶ And thereby He leads none astray save those who abandon obedience to Him, those who depart from following His command and prohibition, those who violate God's covenants, which He made binding on them in the scriptures which He sent down to His Messengers and through the tongues of His prophets, 'and by which they were obligated' to follow the command of His Messenger, Muḥammad, and what he brought, and to obey God in making his affair clear to the people, 'according' to what He imposed upon them in the Torah, and to inform them that they had found written in their 'scriptures' that he was a Messenger from God to whom obedience has been prescribed, and in not concealing that from them.

Their violation and breaking of this 'undertaking' was their contravention against God according to the terms of His covenant with them—in respect to what I have described that He imposed on them—after they had given their Lord a solemn undertaking to fulfil it; this is as our Lord describes them in His words: «And there succeeded after them a succession who inherited the scripture, taking the chance goods of this lower world, and saying: 'It will be forgiven us'; and if chance goods the like of them come to them, they will take them. Has not the solemn undertaking of the scripture been taken from them, that they should say nothing concerning God save the truth?» (7: 169)

¶ «AFTER ITS SOLEMN BINDING»: After God had confirmed His trust in them by exacting His covenants whereby they would fulfil for Him what He had imposed on them therein.

(...)

Included in the judgement of this verse are all those who have the qualities with which God describes these ungodly people among the hypocrites and unbelievers—breaking the covenant, severing ties of birth, and doing corruption in the land.

(...)

⇒Al-Rabī 'b. Anas':

'What is described in this verse' are six defects in the hypocrites. If

they gain the upper hand, they manifest all six defects: when they speak they lie, when they make a promise they break 'it', when they are trusted they betray, they break the covenant of God after its solemn binding, they sever what God has commanded should be joined, and they work corruption in the land. If they are overcome, they manifest three defects: when they speak they lie, when they make a promise they break 'it', and when they are trusted they betray. [573]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YAQṬA' ŪNA
MĀ AMARA 'LLĀHU BI-HI AN YŪṢALA

What God wishes should be joined, the severing of which He criticizes in this verse, are the ties of birth (*rahim*). He has made this clear in His Book when He said: «If you turned away, could it be that you would then work corruption in the land, and sever your ties of birth?» (47: 22) By the 'ties of birth' He means the kin of the womb (*ahl al-rahim*) who are united by the womb of one woman. The 'severing' of 'these ties' is their suppression by giving up the fulfilment of the rights of 'kin' which God has enjoined, and the kindness to 'kin' which He has imposed. And 'joining' them 'means' fulfilling the rights of God which He has imposed in connection with 'kin', and feeling affection towards them as such affection is required.

(...)

⇒ Qatāda:

«'Aṇḍ such as sever what God has commanded should be joined»; by God, what God commanded should be joined was severed by rupturing the ties of birth and kinship. [574]

One 'of the learned' interpreted this 'to mean' that God censured them for their severing relations with the Messenger of God, with the believers in Him, as well as with their kin. He cited the generality of the ostensive meaning of the verse as evidence for this, 'saying' that it does not indicate that only one of the things God has commanded is meant by it, and not others. . . . This opinion in the interpretation of this verse is not far from the truth, but God has mentioned the hypocrites in more than one verse of His Book, and described them as severing the ties of birth, and this 'verse' is like those. However, even if it is so, 'the verse' indicates that God censures all those who sever relationships which He

has commanded be maintained, be they relationships of blood or of other 'kinds'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YUFSID ŪNA FI 'L-ARḌI

Their corruption in the land is their disobedience to their Lord, their disbelief in Him, their giving His Messenger the lie, their repudiation of his prophethood, and their denial that what he brought from God was truly from Him, 'all of' which we have previously described.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ULĀ'IKA HUMU 'L-KHĀSIR ŪNA

The 'losers' are those who diminish their own souls' portion of God's Mercy by disobeying Him, just as a man loses in his business when his capital depreciates from a sale. It is thus with the unbeliever and the hypocrite: he loses through God's withdrawing from him His Mercy which He has created for His servants in the Resurrection, 'although' he is the most in need of His Mercy.‡

It has been said that the meaning of «they shall be the losers» is 'they shall perish (*hālikūn*).'. It is possible that the one who said this meant what we have said of the ruin of the one whom God described . . . in this verse by God's withdrawal of His Mercy . . . because of disobedience to Him and disbelief in Him. He thus made his interpretation of the phrase agree with its 'general' meaning, without giving a specific explanation of the interpretation of the word itself. The interpreters sometimes do this for numerous reasons which require them to do so.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

By everything He ascribes to people other than the people of Islam in relation to a noun such as 'loser', God means 'unbelief'. By whatever He ascribes to the people of Islam 'in such a way', He means 'misdeeds'. [575]

2: 28-9

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمَيِّتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ * هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

*kaifa takfurūna bi-'llāhi wa-kuntum amwātan fa-aḥyā-kum thumma yumītu-kum thumma yuhyī-kum thumma ilay-hi turja'ūna * huwa 'lladhī khalaqa la-kum mā fi 'l-arḍi jamī'an thumma 'stawā ila 'l-samā'i fa-sauwā-hunna sab'a samāwātin wa-huwa bi-kulli shai'in 'alīmun*

How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life, then He causes you to die, then He gives you life, then unto Him are you returned? * It is He Who created for you all that is in the earth, then He rose up to the heavens and ordered them into seven heavens; and He has knowledge of everything.

THE INTERPRETATION OF KAIFA TAKFURŪNA BI-'LLĀHI

WA-KUNTUM AMWĀTAN FA-AḤYĀ-KUM

THUMMA YUMĪTU-KUM THUMMA YUHYĪ-KUM

THUMMA ILAY-HI TURJA' ŪNA *

HUWA 'LLADHĪ KHALAQA LA-KUM MĀ FI 'L-ARḌI JAMĪ'AN

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions, concerning «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life, then He causes you to die, then He gives you life»:

You were nothing, then He created you, then He shall cause you to die, then He shall give you life on the Day of the Resurrection. [576. See also ⇒ Abū Mālik, 578 and 579]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd', concerning the verse «You have caused us to die two deaths, and You have given us twice to live» (40: 11):

This is similar to what is in 'the sura of' the Cow. [577. See also ⇒ Abū Mālik, 578, 579; ⇒ Mujāhid, 580]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

Abu 'l-Āliya told me about the words of God «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead»: 'When they were not anything, He gave them life when He created them, then He made them dead, then He shall give them life on the Day of the Resurrection, then they shall return to Him after life. [582]

(..)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, concerning the verse «You have caused us to die two deaths, and You have given us twice to live» (40: 11):

You were dust (*turāb*) before He created you,¹ and this is a kind of death; then He gave you life and created you, and this is a kind of vivification. Then He causes you to die and you shall return to the grave, and this is another kind of death. Then He shall awaken you on the Day of the Resurrection, and this is a kind of vivification. These are two kinds of death and two lives, and these are His words: «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life, then He causes you to die, then He gives you life, then unto Him are you returned?» [583]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn Šāliḥ, concerning 'this verse' . . . :

He shall give you life in the grave, then He shall make you die. [584]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Qatāda, concerning 'this verse' . . . :

They were dead in the loins of their fathers, and God gave them life and created them; then He makes them die the inescapable death; then He shall give them life at the Awakening on the Day of the Resurrection: these are two lives and two deaths. [585]

FOURTH OPINION

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

Ibn Zaid said, concerning God's words: «Our Lord, You have caused us to die two deaths, and You have given us twice to live»:

'He created them from the back of Adam when He took the solemn undertaking (*mīthāq*) from them. «And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify about themselves: "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yes, we testify"—lest you should say on the Day of the Resurrection: "As for us, we were heedless of this",¹ or lest you say: "Our fathers were idolaters aforetime, and we were seed after them. What, will You then destroy us for the deeds of the vain-doers?"» (7: 172-3) He gave them intellect and took the solemn undertaking from them. He extracted one of Adam's ribs—the lowest rib next to the flank (*al-quṣairā*)—and created Eve from it.'

'Ibn Zaid¹ narrated this from the Prophet. He said: 'That is 'what is meant by¹ the words of God: «Mankind, fear your Lord, Who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women.» (4: 1) After this He scattered many creatures from the pair of them into the wombs: «He creates you in your mother's wombs, creation after creation» (39: 6).' He explained: 'A creation after that. After He had taken the solemn undertaking from them, He made them die, then He created them in the wombs, then He made them die, then He shall give them life on the Day of the Resurrection. That is 'what is meant by¹ the words of God: «"Our Lord, You have caused us to die two deaths, and Thou hast given us twice to live"».' He recited 'further God's words¹ «We took from them a sacred undertaking» (33: 7); he commented: 'On that day.' And he recited 'God's words¹ «And remember God's blessing upon you, and His solemn undertaking which He made with you when you said: 'We have heard and we obey.'» (5: 7) [586]

TABARĪ'S COMMENTS: There is a 'certain¹ aspect and approach to the interpretation 'of this passage¹ in each of the opinions which we have related . . .

. . . Those who interpreted «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life» 'to mean¹ 'You were not anything'¹, q.v., the first opinion above¹, thought in terms of what the Arabs say for something which is effaced, something which is 'lost¹ in oblivion: 'This thing is dead (*māyit*)'. . . Likewise, one says for the opposite: 'This thing is living (*ḥāy*)', 'a living reputation', meaning, by describing it thus, that it is renowned, widely known among the

people.‡ Thus it is with 'their¹ interpretation of 'this verse¹, . . . 'which they say means¹: You were nothing, you were unknown, and that was your death; then He gave you life and made you a living people who were in the minds 'of men¹, who were known;² then He makes you dead by taking possession of your spirits and by sending you back to a state like that in which you were before He gave you life—the memory of you wiped out, your traces effaced, and your affairs obliterated; then He shall give you life by restoring your bodies to their 'original¹ forms, inspiring the spirit into them, setting you up as men as you were before 'you were¹ caused to die—you shall recognize each other at your Awakening and at the Final Assembling.

. . . Those who interpreted it 'to mean¹ the death which is the soul's exit from the body¹, q.v., the second opinion above¹, must have taken «seeing you were dead» as an address to people in their graves after they had been given life in their graves. But this is a remote meaning, because the rebuke there¹, i.e., in the grave,¹ is a rebuke for their previously committed offence, not a demand for 'them¹ to ask God for forgiveness and to return to what pleases 'God¹ (*isti'tāb wa 'stirjā*). Now God's words «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead» are a rebuke requesting His servants to solicit His forgiveness, a reproof to bring back His creatures from disobedience to obedience, from errancy to contrition, and there is no contrition 'possible¹ in the grave after death nor repentance after 'their¹ decease.

As for . . . Qatāda's view that they were dead in the loins of their fathers¹, q.v., the third opinion above¹: if by that he meant that in 'the loins¹ they were sperm and not spirits, then they have the same meaning as 'that of¹ other inanimate things in which there are no spirits. God's making them live is His inspiring spirits into them, and His making them die afterwards is His taking possession of their spirits. His 're¹vivification of them after that is His inspiring spirits into their bodies on the day the Trumpet shall be blown and He awakens 'all¹ creatures at the appointed time.

As for Ibn Zaid, he himself explained what he meant by his interpretation of this 'verse¹. According to him, the first causing to die was God's returning His servants into the loins of their fathers, after He had taken them from the loins of Adam. The next vivification is the inspiring of spirits into them in the wombs of their mothers, and the second causing to die is the taking of their spirits on the 'ir¹ return to dust and during the 'ir¹ passage through the *barzakh*³ to the Day of the Awakening. The third revivification

is the breathing of the spirits into them at the Awakening of the Hour and the announcement of the Resurrection.

If anyone studies this interpretation, he will find that it alone is contrary to the ostensive meaning of the word of God, of which the exegesis is claimed by the exegete to be the opinion we have described above. Now God announced in His Book that those of His creatures about whom He was talking said: «'Our Lord, You have caused us to die two deaths, and You have given us twice to live . . .', but Ibn Zaid claimed in his commentary that God made them live three times and die three times. Now the matter as we see it is 'thus': part of what he described is God's extracting Adam's seed from his loins and taking a solemn undertaking from them, but this is not in any way part of the interpretation of these two verses¹, i.e., 2: 28 and 40: 11,¹ . . . for no one claims that God causes whoever He has created at that time to die, apart from 'His' causing 'them' to die 'later' when they pass through the *barzakh*, so it is not legitimate to develop the interpretation of the verse in the direction in which Ibn Zaid developed it.

FIFTH OPINION: Some of them said that the first death is the departure of the man's sperm from his body into the womb of the woman, and that it is dead from the time of its departure from 'the man's' body up to the inspiration of the spirit into it. Then God gives it life by breathing the spirit into it and making it a well-developed human being after it has gone through several stages. Then He makes it die a second death by taking the spirit from it, and it is dead in the *barzakh* up to the day when the Trumpet shall be blown, and He sends the spirit back into its body, and it returns to a sound life upon the Awakening of the Resurrection. These are the two deaths and the two lives. Now these people make this claim because they say that death for something that has spirit is the departure of the spirit from it, and they claim that everything which belongs 'to the body' of a human being is living as long as it does not become separated from the living, animate body. But whenever it does become separated from the living, animate body, life departs from it and it becomes mortified. Like one of the limbs of the body—one of the hands, for example, or one of the feet—if it is severed and removed from 'the body', which is living, then that which has been severed from the body is mortified, with no spirit in it, due to its separation from the body in which the spirit resided. Thus it is with the living sperm, they say, as long as it does not depart from the animate body 'of the man'; but when it does become

separated from it, and leaves it, it is mortified, just as are the hand and the foot and the other parts of the body, as we have described. This would be an 'acceptable' opinion and interpretation—if the one whose opinion it was were one of the authorities who are approved of for their interpretations of the Qur'ān.

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The most preferable of the opinions we have expounded for the interpretation of 'this verse' . . . is the one we have quoted from Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās '576', whereby the meaning of «you were dead» is: 'You were' in oblivion, latent as sperm in the loins of your fathers, being unknown and not being in the minds of men. Then He gave you life and brought you forth as healthy human beings, so that you were in the minds of men, you were known, and you were living. Then He causes your death by taking away your spirits, and returns you to the state of crumbled remains, not known and not remembered, in the *barzakh*, until the Day when you shall be awakened. Then He shall give you life after that by breathing the spirits into you upon the Awakening of the Hour and the Cry of the Resurrection. Then you shall return to God after that—as He has said: «then unto Him are you returned»—because God shall give them life in the grave before He assembles them, then He shall assemble them at the Station of the Reckoning, as He has said: «The day they shall come forth from the tombs hastily, as if they were hurrying to a waymark» (70: 43), and «And the Trumpet shall be blown, then behold, from their graves they slide out unto their Lord.» (36: 51) We have preferred this interpretation because of what we have previously mentioned in favour of those who held this view, and because of the incorrectness of those who opposed them, as we have already explained.

COMMENTARY: This verse is a rebuke, from God, to those who said «'We believe in God and in the Last Day'», about whom God said that, despite their uttering this with their mouths, they do not believe in it. They said this only in an attempt to deceive God and the believers, so God reproved them by saying: «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life?», and reprimanded them and remonstrated against them about what they denied about this and 'about what they' disavowed in their sick hearts, and He said: 'How can you disbelieve in God, denying His power to give you life—after He has made you dead—for the Awakening of the Resurrection, and for the recompense of the wicked among you for their sin and of the

good for their good-doing: you were dead sperm in the loins of your fathers, and He brought you forth as well-formed creatures, and made you alive; then He makes you dead after bringing you forth. You know that whoever has the power to do this cannot be incapable . . . of giving you life after making you dead, or of bringing you back after annihilating you, or of assembling you before Him to recompense you for your deeds.'

Then for the 'se people' and their collaborators among the Jewish rabbis—He combined the accounts of them and of the hypocrites in many of the verses of this sura, beginning with 'verse 6' . . . —our Lord enumerated His blessings which previously passed from Him to them and their forefathers, and which had a great impact on them. Then He took many of 'the blessings' away from many of them for the sins which they committed and the outrages they perpetrated, and for replacing obedience with disobedience, thereby warning them that their chastisement would be hastened, as it was hastened for their ancestors and predecessors, filling them with fear that His exemplary punishments would overtake them, as they had overtaken their forebears, and letting them know that their safety and their deliverance from punishment on the Day of the Resurrection lay in returning promptly to Him and in repenting speedily.

After this enumeration of blessings . . . , He began to speak about our, and their, 'fore'father, Adam, the father of mankind, may God bless him, and of God's previous magnanimity towards him and the benefits He 'placed' before him, and of His speedy punishment which befell him and his enemy Iblīs for their disobedience and their violation of what He had commanded them. And 'He spoke of' His encompassing Adam with His mercy when he repented and returned to Him, and how He brought down His curse on Iblīs in this world and prepared an everlasting chastisement for him in the next, since he was arrogant and refused to repent before Him and return to Him. 'In this way' He alerted them to His decision concerning those who turn repentantly to Him, and His judgement against those who are arrogant and will not return, thereby rendering Himself excused, and warning them, so that they might ponder upon His signs, and so that those among them possessed of minds might reflect, especially the people of scripture, because He mentioned the stories of Adam and, together with, and after, them, the other stories which the people of scripture knew, but of which the unlettered polytheist and idol-worshipping people were ignorant. He brought His proof of His Prophet,

Muḥammad, 'specifically' against them, not 'against' the other kinds of people who had no knowledge of these things. He informed them about this in order that 'the people of scripture' should know that he was the Messenger sent by God, and that what he brought them is from Him, for these stories which he told them were part of their hidden knowledge and the well-guarded contents of their scriptures, and among the secret things of which none but them and those that learn from them and read their scriptures could claim to have knowledge. For it is known of Muḥammad that he did not know writing, and that he never read their books, nor kept company with a single one of them, so that they could claim that he had taken these things from their scriptures or from any of them 'personally'.

So, setting before them the blessings which they continue to receive despite their disbelief in Him and their failure to give thanks to Him for them through obeying Him as He has enjoined them, He said: «It is He Who created for you all that is in the earth, then rose up to the heavens and ordered them seven heavens; and He has knowledge of everything.» He informed them that He created all that is in the earth for them, because the earth and all that is in it are useful for the children of Adam, both in religion, because it is a proof of the oneness of their Lord, and in 'the affairs of' this world, because it is 'their' means of sustenance and a means for them to attain obedience to Him and to discharge 'their' duties to Him.

(...)

¶ How can you disbelieve in God, seeing that you were sperm in the loins of your fathers and He made you living human beings; then He shall cause your death, then He shall give you life after that and awaken you on the Day of the Assembly for reward and punishment. It is He who blesses you with your sustenance and the evidence for you of the oneness of your Lord, which He has created for you on the earth.

(...)

⇒Qatāda:

«It is He Who created for you all that is in the earth»: Yes, by God, He made what is in the earth subservient to you. [587]

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA 'STAWĀ ILA 'L-SAMĀ'I
FA-SAUWĀ-HUNNA SAB'A 'L-SAMĀWĀTIN

[T]: « THEN HE ROSE UP TO THE HEAVENS »: FIRST OPINION:
Some of them said that *istawā* means 'to turn towards'.†

(...)

SECOND OPINION: Some of them said that this cannot involve any
'physical' change 'of direction' in God, but that it means 'He changed'
His action.

(...)

THIRD OPINION: Some of them said that . . . it means 'He turned
his attention to it.'

(...)

FOURTH OPINION: Some of them said . . . 'it means' 'to get up',
'to rise up'.

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

He rose up to the heavens. [588]

Then those who interpreted it to mean 'to become higher', 'to go up',
differed about who or what went up to the heavens. Some of them said
it was the 'heavens' Creator, the One who brought them into being,
while others said it was the vapour (*dukhān*) of the earth⁴ out of which
God created the heavens.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: In the speech of the Arabs, *istawā*' has several
meanings. It can mean: the end of a man's youth and vigour . . . ,
soundness of one's situation after insufficiency . . . ,† turning to want
something . . . , appropriation and seizure . . . , and rising and lifting up. .
. . The preferred meaning for God's words «*thumma 'stawā ila 'l-samā' i
fa-sauwā-hunna*» is 'He rose above them, and arranged them through
His power, and created seven heavens out of them.'

§ To the objection that 'rising above' means that God must first have been
under the heavens (and thus that He changes His physical position), Ṭabarī
replies, using a dialectical argument, that the same objection can be levelled
against any of the other interpretations, which all involve some kind of change
from one direction to another, so that none of them is a better interpretation
on this score.

QUESTION: Do 'you' mean that God rose to heaven before or after
creating it?

REPLY: Afterwards, but before He ordered 'it into' seven heavens, as
He said: «Then He rose to the heavens when they were vapour, and said
to them and to the earth: 'Come willingly, or unwillingly!'» (41: 11)
The rising was after He created them as vapour, and before He ordered
them into seven heavens.

Some, however, said that He said «then He rose up to the heavens»
when there was not yet any heaven, as when one man says to another
'Make this cloth', when he only has the yarn.

When He said «*fa-sauwā-hunna*», He meant that He prepared them,
created them, arranged them, and set them up. In the speech of the
Arabs, 'this word' . . . means 'setting up', 'putting in order', and
'making ready'. . . Thus God's ordering out His heavens is His setting
them up and arranging them as He willed, His opening them up after
He had cleaved them together.⁵

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

He put His creation of them in order. . . [589, the continuation of
588]

He said «and He ordered them», and expressed the pronoun as a
plural. But He has already said «then He rose up to the *samā'*»†, which is
in the singular. . . 'This is' because *samā'* is a 'collective noun' . . .
whose singular is *samāwa*, and this singular/collective†, i.e., *samāwa/
samā'* is to be considered just like *baqara/baqar* (=cows/cows),
nakhla/nakhl (=date-palm), and so forth. This is why *samā'* is some-
times feminine . . . and sometimes masculine.⁶ . . .

An Arabic scholar⁷ has claimed that *samā'* is a singular, and does not
signify 'heavens', and that when He said «and ordered them» He meant
'the heaven' which had already been mentioned and the other heavens
that 'the pronoun' indicates which have not been mentioned. . .

OBJECTION: You have said that God rose to heaven when it was
vapour before He ordered it into seven heavens, and that He then
ordered it into seven after He had risen up to it; so how can you claim
that '*samā'*' is a plural?

REPLY: They were seven 'originally' but not ordered, and this is why
He says «He ordered them into seven».

⇒Muḥammad b. Ishāq:

The first of God's creatures was light and darkness. Then He differentiated them, and made darkness a black, tenebrous night, and light a bright, clear day. Then He condensed the seven heavens out of vapour—it is said, but God knows best, 'that it was¹ out of water vapour—so that they rose up, but He had not made them firm. He caused the night to become dark in the lowest heaven and brought forth its morning, and night and day took their course therein, but there was no sun, nor moon, nor stars. Then He spread out the earth and made it stable with mountains; He appointed nutriments and dispersed what creatures He willed therein. He completed the earth and the nutriments He appointed therein, within four days.⁸ Then «He rose up to the heavens when they were vapour» (41: 11)—as He has said—and condensed them, and in the lowest heaven He made its sun, moon, and stars; «and He revealed in every heaven its commandment» (41: 12). He completed their creation in two days,⁹ and finished the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days. Then, on the seventh day, He rose above His heavens, and said to the heavens and the earth: «'Come willingly, or unwillingly,» (41: 11) to what I will for you.' And they became calm, willingly or unwillingly, and said: 'We come, obedient.' [590]

Ibn Ishāq said that God rose up to the heavens, after creating the earth and what was in it, when they were seven, made of vapour, and He put them in order as He described. We have quoted what Ibn Ishāq said as evidence for our view about this because it is a clearer explanation than any other . . . , a better commentary for what we wanted to prove, i.e., that the meaning of *samā'* 'in this passage¹ is a plural, as we have described. . . .

QUESTION: What is this 'ordering' by God of the heavens . . . , if they were already created as seven before He put them in order? What is the reason for mentioning their creation after mentioning the creation of the earth? Is it because it was created before them? Or is there some other meaning?

REPLY: We have quoted this in the report which has been narrated to us from Ibn Ishāq, but we shall confirm it by the reports and statements of several pious predecessors which we shall add to it.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, concerning «It is He who created for you all that is in the earth, then He rose up to the heavens and ordered them into seven heavens»:

The throne of God was on the water, and He had not created anything apart from what He had created before the water. When He wished to create 'His' creatures, He brought vapour forth from the water, and it rose up above the water and was over it, and He named it 'the heavens'. Then He dried the water and made it a single earth; then He opened it up (*fataqa*) and made seven earths in two days—Sunday and Monday. He created the earth on a whale, and the whale is the 'letter' *nūn*, 'n',¹ which God has mentioned in the Qur'ān: «*Nūn*. By the pen . . . » (68: 1). And the whale is on the water, and the water is on the back of a rock, and the rock is on the back of an angel, and the angel is on the back of a stone, and the stone is in the wind; it is the stone which, Luqmān mentioned, is neither in the heavens nor in the earth.¹⁰ Then the whale moved and become agitated, and the earth trembled, so He fixed mountains firmly upon it and it became steady, and the mountains glory over the earth, and this is what He has said: «and He cast on the earth firm mountains, lest it shake with you» (16: 15, and 31: 10). So He created the mountains therein, and sustenance for its inhabitants, and its trees and what was necessary for it, in two days—Tuesday and Wednesday. Concerning this, He says: «'What, do you disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days, and do you set up equals to Him Who is the Lord of the worlds? And He set therein firm mountains over it, and He blessed it'»—meaning: He caused its trees to grow—«and appointed therein its 'diverse' sustenance'»—meaning: Its sustenance for its inhabitants—«'in four days, equal to those who ask.'»—meaning: Say to those who ask: 'This is 'the truth of' the matter.'»—«'Then He rose up to the heavens when it was vapour'» (41: 9-11), and this vapour came from the exhalation of the water when it exhaled, and He made of it a single heaven. Then He opened it up and made seven heavens in two days—Thursday and Friday. Friday is called *yaum al-jum'a* (=day of assembly), because He brought together (*jama'a*) the creation of the heavens and the earth on 'this day'. «'And He revealed in every heaven its commandment» (42: 12), meaning: He created in every heaven its creatures—angels and the creatures which are in it, the sea, the

mountains, the hail, and what cannot be known about. Then He adorned the lowest heaven with stars, making them a decoration and a defence, defending against the satans.¹¹ And when He had finished the creatures that He wished, He rose up upon His throne. And this is His saying: «¹He¹ created the heavens and the earth in six days» (7: 54); and «they were a mass all cleaved together, and then We opened them up» (21: 30). [591]

⇒ Mujāhid:

He created the earth before the heavens. And when He created the earth, vapour rose up from it, and that is when He says: «then He rose up to the heavens and ordered them out into seven heavens» . . . one above the other, and seven earths, one beneath the other. [592]

⇒ Qatāda:

«¹A¹nd ordered them out into seven heavens»: one above the other, with a distance of five hundred years between each heaven. [593]

(. .)

¶ He it is who bestowed blessings on you, and created for you all that is in the earth, and made it subservient to you, thereby bestowing it upon you, in order that it be a means of attainment for you in this world of yours, an object of utility until your arrival at your appointed hours, a proof for you of the oneness of your Lord. Then He rose to the seven heavens when they were vapour, and put them in order and drew them together, and caused a sun, a moon, and stars to run in one of them. Then He appointed His creatures in each of them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-HUWA BI-KULLI SHAI'IN* *'ALĪMUN*

¶ To the One Who created you, and created for you all that is in the earth, and ordered out the seven heavens with what is in them, and made them firm with water vapour and perfected their making, to Him what you disclose and what you keep secret in your souls is not hidden, O you hypocrites and deviating unbelievers in Him among the people of scripture, even if your hypocrites declare with their tongues «¹We believe in God and in the Last Day¹» while they conceal their

denial of it. Your rabbis deny the guidance and light which My Messenger brought them, although they know it is true. They reject it and keep secret what I imposed upon them—to expound to My creatures the matter of Muḥammad and his prophethood—when they ¹certainly¹ know it. Indeed, I have knowledge of this and other affairs of yours, and of the affairs of others. Truly I have knowledge of everything.

¹*Alīm* means the same as ¹*ālīm* (= knowing).

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

¹The ¹*ālīm*¹ is the one who knows who is perfect in his knowledge. [596]

¹ For the creation of Adam, see *Exeg.* 2: 30, pp. 209-24.

² See also 76: 1.

³ The term *barzakh* (= lit., obstacle, separation) has the traditional eschatological sense of an area intermediate between this world and the Hereafter, through which all men must pass before the Resurrection. The word occurs in three places in the Qur'ān: once (23: 100) in an eschatological sense, where it has the meaning of a barrier through which, having crossed it, one cannot return, and twice in reference to a 'barrier' between two seas, one fresh, the other salt, which prevents their mingling (25: 53 and 55: 20).

⁴ See 41: 11.

⁵ See 21: 30.

⁶ Because a collective which can form a singular by suffixing *-a(h)* can be either feminine or masculine—it is masculine by form and feminine by signification.

⁷ This refers to al-Farrā' (1955) (Sh. & Sh., I, 432, n. 1).

⁸ See 41: 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See 31: 16.

¹¹ See 15: 17, 18; 37: 7, 8; and 67: 5.

2: 30

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً
 قَالُوْۤا اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ
 نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ اِنِّىْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

*wa-idh qāla rabbu-ka li-'l-malā'ikati innī jā'ilun fi 'l-arḍi khalīfatan
 qālū a-taj'alu fi-hā man yufsidu fi-hā wa-yasfiku 'l-dimā'a wa-naḥnu
 nusabbihū bi-ḥamdi-ka wa-nuqaddisu la-ka qāla innī a'lamu mā lā
 ta'lamūna*

And when your Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to place a vicegerent on earth.' Then they said: 'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?' He said: 'Assuredly I know what you do not know.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDH QĀLA RABBU-KA

§ There is a problem here and elsewhere in the Qur'ān with the Arabic word *idh*. It should introduce the second clause in a compound sentence such as 'I arrived at the meeting when (*idh*) it was breaking up', but in this verse, and other similar ones there seems to be nothing as a first clause. The claim was put forward by the Baṣran philologist Abū 'Ubaida¹ that the particle *idh* (= when) was redundant. Ṭabarī rejects this argument on the grounds that *idh* is essential to the meaning of the verse taken in the context of what comes before and after it.

QUESTION: What, then, is the meaning of this 'clause'? What is the *idh* 'clause' connected to if there is nothing in the preceding passage to which it is attached?

REPLY: We have already mentioned that God addresses the 'preceding' two verses and what follows them to those to whom He says «How do you disbelieve in God seeing that you were dead and He gave you life?», and rebukes them, denouncing the evil of their deeds and of their remaining in errancy despite the blessings He has bestowed on them and their forebears. He reminds them of His might by

enumerating 'these' blessings . . ., and makes known to them His favourable disposition towards those of them who repented, urging them to seek forgiveness. Among His blessings which He enumerated was that He had created all that is on earth for them, and had made the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens subservient to them, as well as other benefits He had set up for them and the rest of mankind. In His words «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life, then He causes you to die, then He gives you life, then unto Him you are returned?» is the meaning: 'Recall My blessings which I bestowed on you when I created you while you were not anything, and 'when' I created for you all that is on earth and ordered what is in the heavens for you.' Then He connects His words «And when your Lord said to the angels» with the meaning necessarily implied by His words «How do you disbelieve in God . . .», since they necessarily imply what I have mentioned, 'i.e.,' 'Recall My blessings when I did for you as I did, and recall what I did for your 'fore'father, Adam, when (*idh*) I said to the angels: «"I am about to place a vicegerent on earth."»'

§ Ṭabarī gives an example from poetry for expressions connecting back to unstated but necessarily implied clauses.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LI-'L-MALĀ'IKA

Malā'ika is the plural of *mal'ak*, although the singular is more usual and better known in the speech of the Arabs without the *hamza* (')¹, i.e., *malak*,¹ than with. . . . When they form the plural, they go back to the original with the *hamza*, and they say *malā'ika*.

§ Ṭabarī gives other examples of omitted *hamzas* in singular nouns, and comments on the plural form, of which *malā'ika* is an example, which has an optional *-a* at the end, i.e., it can also be found as *malā'ik*.

The basic meaning of *mal'ak* is a 'message'.[‡] Some say that *mal'ak* is the *maf'al* form of 'the verb' *la'aka* (= to send a message); and some say 'it' . . . is the *maf'ul* form of the verb *alaka* (= to send a messenger).[‡]

Angels are thus called *malā'ika* (= those who are sent) because of the Message, for they are God's messengers between Him and His prophets, and those of His servants to whom they are sent.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *INNĪ JĀ'ILUN FI 'L-ARḌI*

The interpreters differ about His words «*innī jā'il*». Some say 'it means' 'I am about to do . . .' [vide ⇒ al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatāda 597, see 611 below], and others say 'it means' 'I am about to create' [vide ⇒ Abū Rauq 'from al-Ḍahhāk' 598]. The correct interpretation of 'this passage' . . . is that He was about to appoint a *khalīfa* on the earth . . . , and is more like the interpretation which al-Ḥasan and Qatāda gave.

It is said that the 'earth' which God mentioned in this verse is Mecca.

⇒ Ibn Sābiṭ 'told 'Aṭā'':

The Prophet said: 'The earth was spread out from Mecca, and the angels used to circumambulate the House (*bait*, = the Ka'ba). They were the first to circumambulate it, and that was the "earth" which God mentioned: «"I am about to place a vicegerent on earth"». Whenever a prophet's people were destroyed and he and the pious were saved, he and those with him would come to 'the House' and worship God there until they died. Thus the tomb of Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, and Shu'aib is between 'the well of' Zamzam, and the Corner 'of the Ka'ba where the Black Stone is cited', and the Station (*maqām*) 'of Abraham'.² [599]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KHALĪFA*

Khalīfa is the form *fa'ila* derived from the verb *khalafa* meaning to take someone's place after him in some matter, as in His words: «Then We appointed you as *khalīfas* on earth after them, that We might behold how you would do» (10: 14), meaning that He replaced them with you on earth, and appointed you as *khalīfas* after them. Because of this, the supreme ruler (*al-sulṭān al-a'ẓam*) is called the *khalīfa* (= caliph), because he replaces the one who was before him, and takes his place in the affair, and is his successor (*khalaf*).

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

'«"I am about to place a vicegerent on earth":' . . . someone who will reside there and dwell there as a successor. He is not one of you 'angels'. [600, see 615 below]

What Ibn Ishāq says about the meaning of *khalīfa* is no explanation of it . . . rather its meaning is as we have just stated.

QUESTION: What resided on earth before mankind, so that mankind could have replaced them and been successors to them?

REPLY: [T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The first to inhabit the earth were the jinn. They spread corruption thereon and shed blood, and killed each other. So God sent Iblīs against them with an army of angels, and Iblīs and those with him killed them pursuing them as far as the islands of the oceans and the summits of the mountains. Then He created Adam and settled him thereon. That is why He has said: «"I am about to place a *khalīfa* on earth."» [601, see 606]

According to this view, «"I am about to place a *khalīfa* on earth"» 'means a 'successor' to the jinn, to replace them on 'earth', to dwell there and reside there.

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

God created the angels on Wednesday, and He created the jinn on Thursday, and He created Adam on Friday. And a group of the jinn disbelieved, so the angels came down to them on earth and fought with them. There was blood, and there was corruption on earth. [602, see 612 below]

SECOND OPINION: Others said . . . 'that the *khalīfas* are' successors who follow on from each other, 'i.e., that they are' the children of Adam who succeed to their father Adam; and each generation succeeds to the generation before them. This is the view narrated from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Similarly:

⇒ Ibn Sābiṭ:

'«"I am about to place a *khalīfa* on earth." They said: 'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there, and shed blood?'» They meant the offspring of Adam. [603]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

God said to the angels: 'I wish to create creatures on earth and place a *khalīfa* there.' At that time God had no creatures except the angels, and there was no creature on earth. [604]

This view could imply what is reported from al-Ḥasan, or it could imply that what Ibn Zaid meant was that God informed the angels that

He was putting someone in His place (*khalīfa*, = vicegerent) on earth to judge between His creatures according to His judgement, as 'in the following opinion'.

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

God said to the angels: «I am about to place a *khalīfa* on earth.»

They said: 'Our Lord, what 'who' will this *khalīfa* be?' He said:

'He will have offspring who will work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other.' [605, see 607 below]

The interpretation of the verse according to this Tradition we have quoted from Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās is: 'I am about to place a vicegerent of Mine on earth to act on My behalf (*yakhluḥu-nī*) in judging between My creatures.' This vicegerent was Adam and those who took his place in obeying God and judging with justice between His creatures. However, the corruption and the unlawful shedding of blood was not 'perpetrated by' His vicegerents, not by Adam and those who took his place among the servants of God. For these two, i.e., Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd, said that God told the angels, when they asked Him: 'What 'who' will this vicegerent be?', 'He is a vicegerent who will have offspring who will work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other.' He ascribed corruption and the unlawful shedding of blood to the offspring of His vicegerent, not to 'His vicegerent himself', and He excluded the latter from it.

Although this interpretation goes against the meaning of *khalīfa* as it is related from al-Ḥasan in one respect, in another respect it agrees with it. The agreement is that the interpreters attribute corruption and the shedding of blood on earth to others besides Adam.* The difference comes when 'Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd' attribute the *khilāfa* to Adam, in the sense of God's appointing him as His vicegerent on 'earth', while al-Ḥasan attributes it to his offspring, in the sense the they are each other's successors, each generation taking the place of the one before, and attributes corruption on earth and the shedding of blood to the *khalīfa*.

What prompted this opinion in those who interpreted His words «I am about to place a vicegerent on earth» according to the interpretation of al-Ḥasan, is that they held that when the angels said to their

* Reading *Adam* instead of *al-khalīfa* (Sh. & Sh., I, 452, l.13). The meaning of the text is unclear here, and, as it stands, is plainly contradictory.

Lord . . . «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood, . . .?» they were speaking of the vicegerent whom God had said He was placing on earth, and not of anyone else, because the exchange between the angels and their Lord concerned him. They believed that if this was the case, and God had freed Adam from corruption on earth and shedding blood, and purified him from this, it was clear that whoever was meant here was not him, but 'a person or persons' among his offspring. So 'they thought' it was proven that the *khalīfa* who spread corruption on earth and shed blood was someone other than Adam, and that it was his sons who did this, so that the meaning of the *khilāfa* which God mentioned was the succession of one generation of them after the other as we have described.

But those who held this view, and interpreted the verse thus, disregarded the 'proper' way to interpret 'it', which is that when their Lord said to the angels «I am about to place a vicegerent on earth», the corruption and shedding of blood were not attributed, in their reply to their Lord, to His *khalīfa* on earth; rather, they said «'Will You place thereon one', i.e., someone, not necessarily Adam, who will work corruption there . . .?», and it cannot be denied that their Lord may have informed them that His vicegerent would have offspring from whom the corruption and shedding of blood would come. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLŪ ATA J'ALU FĪ-HĀ MAN YUFSIDU FĪ-HĀ WA-YAFIKU 'L-DIMĀ

QUESTION: How could the angels say to their Lord, when He told them that He was placing a vicegerent on earth: «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there, and shed blood?», when Adam had not yet been created, let alone his offspring, so that 'the angels' could have known through 'the evidence of' their eyes what they would do? Did they have knowledge of the unperceivable (*ghaib*), that they could say this? Or did they say what they said through conjecture? But that would only have been suppositional evidence that they gave, a statement of what they did not know 'for certain'; and that is not 'in accordance with' their attributes. What else could be the reason for what they said to their Lord?

REPLY: [T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Al-Ḍaḥḥāk:

Ibn 'Abbās said: 'Iblīs was from a tribe of the angels called al-Ḥinn

who were created from the fire of the Samūm³ from the midst of the angels. (...) His name was al-Hārith. (...) He was one of the custodians of the Garden. (...) Apart from this tribe, all the angels were created from light. (...) The jinn, who were mentioned in the Qur'ān, were created from a smokeless fire,⁴ which is the tongue of the fire which is on the tip 'of the flame' when it flares up. (...) Man was created from clay. And the first to dwell on the earth were the jinn; they worked corruption and shed blood, and killed each other. (...) So God sent Iblīs against them with an army of angels—this was the tribe which was called al-Hinn—and Iblīs and those with him killed them and pursued them to the islands in the oceans and to the summits of the mountains. When Iblīs had done this, he was filled with a secret conceit. He said: "I have done something which no one 'else' has ever done!" (...) But God recognized what was in his heart, although the angels who were with him did not. So God said to the angels who were with him: "I am about to place a vicegerent on earth." And the angels said in reply to Him: "Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there, and shed blood", as the jinn worked corruption and shed blood and we were sent against them for this?" So He said: "Assuredly I know what you do not know", meaning: "Assuredly I am informed, as you are not informed, about Iblīs's heart, about his arrogance and conceit."

Then He commanded Adam's earth (*turba*) 'to be brought to Him', and it was raised up, and God created Adam from 'clinging clay (*ṭīn lāzib*)'⁵—and "clinging" means 'here' "viscid", "thick"—, 'from foetid mud (*ḥama' masnūn*)'⁶—"putrid". (...) It was foetid mud after/in addition to the earth. (...) From it, He created Adam with His hand. (...) He remained forty nights as an inert body, and Iblīs used to come to him and kick him, and he gave a hollow ring 'like a clay pot'—i.e., he made a sound. (...) This is the word of God: 'He created man' of a clay like that of a potter' (55: 14), meaning like something blown up which is not solid. (...) Then he used to go in through his mouth and come out through his rear, and go in through his rear and come out through his mouth; then he said: "You are nothing"—to the hollow ring—"you were not created for anything! Indeed, if I am given power over you I will utterly destroy you; but if you are given power over me I shall surely disobey you!" (...) When God breathed into him of His spirit, breath came from the front of his

head, and everything which came to flow from it within his body became flesh and blood. And when the breathing had reached his navel, he looked at his body and marvelled at how beautiful was what he saw. Then he went to get up, but he could not. This is the word of God: 'Man is ever hasty' (17: 11), i.e., restless, impatient in pleasure and in hardship. (...) When the breathing within his body was complete, he sneezed, and said: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds!", as a result of inspiration (*ilhām*) from God. Then God said to him: "May God have mercy on you, O Adam!" (...) Then God said, to the angels who were with Iblīs in particular, not to the angels who were in the heavens: "Prostrate before Adam!" All of them prostrated together except Iblīs, who refused and was arrogant because of the haughtiness and conceit his soul had instilled in him. He said: "I shall not prostrate before him! I am better than he, older than he, and more powerfully built. You created me from fire, but you created him from clay" (7: 12)—he meant that fire was more powerful than clay. (...) When Iblīs refused to prostrate, God made him dejected (*ablāsa*), i.e., caused him to give up all hope of 'anything' good. He made him a cursed (*rajīm*) satan,⁷ punishing him for his disobedience.

Then He taught Adam the names, all of them, which are the names with which mankind is familiar: "man", "animal", "earth", "plateau", "sea", "mountain", "donkey", and 'all' the nations 'of creatures' and so forth, like these. Then He put these names before these angels, i.e., the angels who were with Iblīs, who had been created from the fire of the Samūm, and said to them: "Now tell me the names of these", meaning "Tell me the names of these if you truthfully know why I am placing a vicegerent on earth." (...) When the angels knew that God was reproaching them for having spoken to Him about the knowledge of the unperceivable, about which none know save Him, about which they knew nothing, they said: "Glory be to You!"—declaring that God was above anyone having knowledge of the unperceivable save He—"We turn to You in repentance. We know not save what You have taught us"—giving up any pretence to knowledge of the unperceivable—"save what You have taught us, like that which You have taught Adam." Then He said: "O Adam, tell them their names." (...) When he had told them their names, He said: "Did I not tell you—specifically, you angels—that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth?" And that

no one but I knows that. «And I know what things you reveal»—what you disclose—«and the things you have been concealing» (2: 31-3)—meaning: “I know what is secret, just as I know what is open”, i.e., the arrogance and conceit which Iblīs concealed in his soul.’ [606]

This Tradition from Ibn ‘Abbās says that God’s words «And when your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am about to place a vicegerent on earth’» were addressed by Him especially to some angels and not to all of them, and that those to whom it was said were specifically the tribe of Iblīs who had, with him, fought the jinn on earth before the creation of Adam. God said this specifically to them as a test and a trial for them, so that they should know the deficiency in their knowledge, the superiority over them of many of His creatures who were more weakly built than they, and that His favour is not bestowed according to bodily power or strength, as Iblīs, the enemy of God, had supposed. ‘The Tradition from Ibn ‘Abbās’ states that what they said to their Lord, ‘i.e.,’ «Will You place thereon one who will work corruption, and shed blood?», was a mistake on their part, a guess about the unperceivable, and that God told them of the reprehensibility of what they had said and informed them, so that they repented and returned to Him from the guess about the unperceivable which they had uttered, and repudiated before Him ‘the belief’ that anyone knows the unperceivable but He. And He showed them the arrogance which Iblīs nursed ‘within himself’, which was hidden from them.

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn ‘Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas‘ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

When God had finished what He wanted to create, He rose upon His throne and placed Iblīs to rule over the heaven of this world. He was of the tribe of the angels called al-Jinn—they were called al-Jinn because they were the custodians of the Garden (*al-janna*).⁸ Iblīs not only ruled, but was also a custodian, and arrogance entered his breast. He said: ‘God has only given me this ‘position’ because of a distinction in me.’ (...) When this arrogance entered his soul, God knew about it, and God said to the angels: «I am about to place a vicegerent on earth.» They said: ‘Our Lord, what, or, who, will this vicegerent be?’ He said: ‘He will have offspring who will work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other.’ They said: ‘Our Lord, «will You place

thereon one who will work corruption, and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?’ He said: ‘Assuredly I know what you do not know’, i.e., of the affair of Iblīs.

So He sent Gabriel to earth to bring some clay from there, and the earth said: ‘I seek refuge in God from you, lest you reduce me or disfigure me!’ So he returned without taking anything. He said: ‘Lord, it sought refuge with You, so I granted it refuge.’ So God sent Michael, and it sought refuge from him, so he gave it refuge, and he came back and said what Gabriel had said. So He sent the angel of death, and it sought refuge from him, so he said: ‘I too seek refuge in God, lest I return without executing His command!’ So he took ‘clay’ from the surface of the earth, and he mixed ‘the clay’ and did not take it from ‘only’ one place; he took red, white, and black earth, and that is why human beings came out different ‘colours’. Then he went up with it and moistened the earth so that it became «clinging clay» (37: 11)—and ‘clinging’ ‘here means’ ‘which sticks together’—, and it was left until it had become putrid and transformed—whereupon He says: «. . . from foetid mud» (15: 26, 28 and 33), meaning ‘putrid’. Then He said to the angels: «I am creating a mortal of clay. When I have shaped him, and breathed of My spirit into him, fall down and prostrate before him.» (38: 71-2) So God created him with His own hands so that Iblīs should not think himself above him, so that He could say to him: ‘You think yourself above what I have done with My own hands, yet I did not raise Myself above it.’ So He created him in human form, and he was a clay body for 40 years, corresponding to the day of Friday.

The angels passed by him and were alarmed when they saw him. But the most alarmed of them was Iblīs, and he would pass by him and strike him, and the body would make a sound like pottery makes, and it had a hollow ring—whereupon He says: «‘He created man’ of a clay like that of a potter» (55: 14)—and he would say: ‘You were created for some reason!’ He would go in through ‘Adam’s mouth and come out through his rear. Then he would say to the angels: ‘Do not be afraid of this: your Lord is solid (*ṣamad*),⁹ but this is hollow. Indeed, if I am given power over it, I shall utterly destroy it.’

When the time came when God wished to breathe the spirit into him, He said to the angels: ‘When I have breathed of my spirit into him, prostrate before him.’ And when He had breathed His

spirit into him, and the spirit entered into his head, he sneezed, and the angels said to him: 'Say "Praise be to God"', and he said: 'Praise be to God', and God said to him: 'May God have mercy on you.' And when the spirit entered his eyes, he saw the fruits of the Garden; then, when it entered his belly, he craved for food and jumped hastily, before the spirit had reached his feet, towards the fruit of the Garden—whereupon He says: «Man was created of haste» (21: 37). «Then all the angels prostrated themselves all together, save Iblīs; he refused to be among those prostrating» (15: 31)—i.e., he was arrogant, and became one of the unbelievers. God said to him: 'What prevented you from prostrating to him whom I created with My hands, when I commanded you?' He said: 'I am better than he; I shall not prostrate before a mortal You have made of clay.' So God said to him: 'Leave this 'Garden'; it is not for you—i.e., you ought not—to become arrogant therein. Leave, then; surely you are one of the humiliated.' (...) «And He taught Adam the names, all of them», then He presented the creatures to the angels «and said: 'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth'» about the children of Adam being workers of corruption on earth and shedders of blood.' They said to him: «'Glory be to You! We know not save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'» God said: «'Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names, He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth? And that I know what things you disclose and what you have been concealing?'» He meant their saying «Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there?»—this is what they disclosed—«and I know . . . what you have been concealing»—He meant the arrogance which Iblīs kept secret in his soul. [607]

The meaning of the first 'part' of this Tradition differs from that of the report which came from Ibn 'Abbās via al-Ḍaḥḥāk which we have previously quoted, but the meaning of the end of it corresponds to that of 'the other'. 'The difference' is that he mentions in the beginning of it that the angels asked their Lord: 'What will this vicegerent be?', when He said to them: «'I am about to place a vicegerent on earth.'» He answered them that 'His vicegerent' would have offspring who would work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other. Then the angels said: «'Will You place thereon one who will work

corruption there, and shed blood?» What the angels said to their Lord came after God's announcement to them that this would come from the offspring of His vicegerent whom He was about to place on earth. This first part is different in meaning from the report of al-Ḍaḥḥāk which we have quoted.

The agreement between the two is at the end, in what they both say in interpreting: «Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly . . .» about the children of Adam working corruption on earth and shedding blood', and in the angels giving up any pretence to knowledge of the unperceivable when their Lord said this to them, and saying: «'Glory be to You! We know not save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'»

If an intelligent person studies this carefully, he can see that the beginning 'of the second Tradition, i.e., [607],¹ negates what comes at the end, and that the last part gainsays the beginning. That is to say that, if God informs the angels that the offspring of the vicegerent which He is placing on earth will work corruption there and shed blood, and the angels say to their Lord: «'Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?'», there is no reason to reproach them for saying what God had told them, . . . in the same way as 'He' . . . had told them, so that they could be told about the knowledge that was kept secret from them: «'If you speak truly'» about the things that you know from God's statement to you will happen, and which you have reported, then tell us about the knowledge which God kept secret from you, just as you told us about what God had informed you about.' This is, rather, a contradiction in the interpretation, and an allegation against God, ascribing a quality to Him¹, i.e., that of trying to catch the angels out,¹ which He cannot possibly have.

I am afraid that one of the transmitters of this Tradition must have made a mistake about the Companion from whom he related it, and that the 'proper' interpretation from 'Ibn 'Abbās *et al.*¹ is as follows: «Tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly» about what you suppose you have understood from the information which I gave you that the children of Adam would work corruption on earth and shed blood, such that you thought it permissible to say: «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and will shed blood?'» The rebuke would then be for what they supposed they had understood from God's saying: 'He will have offspring who will work corruption on earth and shed blood', not for them saying what God had informed them would happen. That is to say, although God told

them what some of the offspring of His vicegerent would do on earth, . . . He had kept concealed from them the information that many of them would obey their Lord, establish order on His earth, and spare lives, and that He would elevate their station and prestige due to that—He did not tell them about this. So, according to the interpretation, and the ostensive meaning, of these two Traditions which I have quoted, the angels said «‘Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?’», on the basis of their supposition that all the offspring of the vicegerent which God placed on earth would work corruption and shed blood there. So God said to them, when He had taught Adam all the names: «Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak truly» «when you say¹ that you know that all the children of Adam will work corruption on earth and shed blood, according to what you have supposed yourselves’, «thereby¹ denying the all-inclusiveness and generality of what they said about this, when it was ‘rather¹ an attribute of a specific ‘group¹ of the offspring of the vicegerent. What we have mentioned is our description of the interpretation of the Tradition, not an opinion of our own choice about the interpretation of the verse.

Confirmation of what we have mentioned about the angels’ statement about ‘human¹ corruption . . . being general comes from:

⇒‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sābiṭ:

«‘Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?’»;¹ they meant humanity. [608]

THIRD OPINION

⇒Qatāda:

«And when your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am about to place a vicegerent on earth’, He was consulting the angels about the creation of Adam, and they said: «‘Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood’»—for the angels knew, from their knowledge of God, that nothing was more odious to God than the shedding of blood and corruption on earth—«‘while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?’ He said: ‘Assuredly I know what you do not know.’» For God knew that prophets, Messengers, righteous people, and dwellers in the Garden, would be ‘descended¹ from this vicegerent. And it has been mentioned to us that Ibn ‘Abbās used to say: ‘When God began to create Adam, the angels said: “Surely God is not going to

create a creature who is dearer to Him than us, or more knowing than us?” So they were put to the test by the creation of Adam; every creature is put to the test, just as the heavens and the earth were put to the test of obedience when God said: «“Come willingly, or unwillingly.” They said: “We come willingly.”» (41: 11) [609]

This Tradition from Qatāda shows that he thought that the angels said what they said, ‘i.e.,’¹ «‘Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?’», not having previously known for certain that that would happen, but only through their own opinion and supposition, and that God denied what they had said, and refuted their opinion, by saying: «‘I know what you do not know’», i.e., that among the offspring of this vicegerent will be prophets, Messengers, and those who strive (*mujtahid*) to obey God.

(...)

Similar ‘to the opinion expressed by¹ Qatāda is the view of a group of the interpreters, among them al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

⇒Al-Ḥasan ‘al-Baṣrī¹, and ⇒Al-Ḥasan ‘al-Baṣrī¹ and Qatāda:

God said to His angels: «‘I am about to place a vicegerent on earth’», meaning: ‘I am about to do (*ḥā’il*) . . .’ But they used their own opinion. God had given them some knowledge, but He had concealed some knowledge from them which they did not have, so they said, according to the knowledge they had: «‘Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood’»—and the angels knew from God’s knowledge that there was no greater sin before God than the shedding of blood—«‘while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?’ He said: ‘Assuredly I know what you do not know.’» Then, when He started to create Adam, the angels muttered about what had become evident, and they said: ‘Let our Lord create what He wishes to create, but He shall never create something unless we were greater than it and dearer to Him.’ When He had created ‘Adam¹ and breathed of His spirit into him, He commanded them to prostrate before him because of what they had said. Thus He showed preference to him over them; and they knew that they were not better than he. So they said: ‘We may be no better than he, but we are more knowing than he is, because we were prior to him, and the nations ‘of other creatures¹ were created prior to

him.' So when they became proud of their knowledge,* they were put to the test, and «He taught Adam the names, all of them; and He presented them to the angels and said: 'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth . . . » about My not creating anything more knowing than you. So «tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth.» (...) Then the group took refuge in repentance—and all believers take refuge in it—and said: «'Glory be to You! We know not save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.' He said: 'Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names He said: 'Did I not tell you I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth? And I know what things you reveal, and what you have been concealing'—because of their having said: 'Indeed, our Lord creates what He wishes, and He would never create something which was dearer to Him than us, or more knowing than us.' (...) He taught him the name of everything—this mountain, this mule driver, camels, jinn, wild beasts—and he began to call everything by its name; He presented every nation 'of creature' to him. Then He said: «'Did I not tell you that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth? And I know what things you reveal, and what you have been concealing.' (...) What they revealed was their saying: «'Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?'», and what they had been concealing was their saying to each other: 'We are better than he and more knowing.' [611]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, concerning 2: 30 and the following verses:

God created the angels on Wednesday, and He created the jinn on Thursday, and He created Adam on Friday. (...) A group of the jinn became unbelievers, and the angels came down to them on earth and killed them: there was blood and there was corruption on earth. And that is why they said: «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption and shed blood?'» [612] «Then He presented them to the angels (...) 'Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'» (...) This was when they said: «'Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?'» (...) When they knew that He was going to place a vicegerent on earth, they said among themselves: 'God will never create

* Reading *bi-'ilmi-him* instead of *bi-'amali-him* (Sh. & Sh., I, 464, l. 19).

anything unless we are more knowing than it and dearer 'to Him'. And God wanted to tell them He had preferred Adam over them. «And He taught Adam the names, all of them», and said to the angels: «'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth. (...) And I know what things you reveal, and what you have been concealing.'» What they revealed was 'expressed' when they said: «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?'», and what they had been concealing among themselves was their saying: 'God will never create anything unless we are more knowing than it and dearer 'to Him'. And they knew that God had preferred Adam over them with respect to knowledge and affection. [613]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

When God created fire, the angels were extremely frightened by it, and said: 'Our Lord, why have You created this fire? For what thing have You created it?' He said: 'For one of My creatures who disobeyed me.' (...) At that time God had no creatures apart from the angels, and there was no creature on the earth: He only created Adam after that. (...) «Has there come on man a while of time when he was a thing unremembered?» (76: 1) (...)—'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said: 'If only that time', i.e., when man was "a thing unremembered", were now, Messenger of God!

(...) The angels said: 'O Lord, will there be a time when we shall disobey you there?', 'for' they saw no creature apart from themselves. He said: 'I wish to create a creature on earth and make him my vicegerent there: he will shed blood and work corruption on earth.' So the angels said: «'Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?'» You have chosen us, so place us thereon: we proclaim Your praise and call You holy, and we shall act there obediently to You.' The angels found it distressing that God should place someone on earth who would disobey Him, so He said: «'Assuredly I know what you do not know.'» «Adam, tell them their names.'» And 'Adam' said: 'Such-and-such and such-and-such.' (...) When 'the angels' saw what knowledge God had bestowed on him, they conceded that Adam was superior to them. But the malicious Iblīs refused to acknowledge him, and said: «'You created me of fire, and him You created of clay.'» 'God' said: «'Get you down out of it; it is not for you to wax proud here . . . » (7: 12, 13). [614]

⇒「Muḥammad」b. Ishāq:

God wished to create Adam by His power, in order to put him to the test and to test 「others」 through him, for He knew what the angels and all His creatures were about. It was the first trial in which the angels were put to the test about their likes and dislikes in order to try and test them with regard to what they did not know; God was thoroughly aware of this about them. Then He gathered the angels inhabiting the heavens and the earth, and said: «I am about to place a vicegerent on earth», meaning: 'someone who will reside there and dwell there as a successor. He is not one of you 「angels」.' Then He told them of His knowledge about them, and said: 'They will work corruption on earth and shed blood, and they will know sin.' Then they all said: «Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy»; we do not sin or do anything reprehensible?' He said: «Assuredly I know what you do not know», meaning: 'I know about you and from you will be—and He had not revealed it to them—disobedience, corruption, shedding of blood, and committing what I abhor on their part when it occurs on earth, as I have mentioned about the children of Adam.' God said to Muḥammad: «「Say: '...」I had no knowledge of the High Council when they disputed. This alone is revealed to me, that I am only a clear warner.' When your Lord said to the angels: 'See, I am creating a mortal of clay. When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit into him, fall down, prostrating, before him!」» (38: 69-72) God told His prophet about His mention of Adam when He wished to create him, and of the angels' consultation of Him concerning what He had told them about 「Adam」.

When God resolved to create Adam, He said to the angels: «See, I am creating a mortal of a clay of foetid mud (*ḥama' masnūn*)» (15: 28) with My own hand—thus granting him honours, making his position magnificent, and ennobling him—, and the angels remembered His compact and recalled His statement, and they all obeyed, except Iblīs, the enemy of God. He kept silent about the envy, the outrage, the arrogance, and the disobedience which was in his soul. And God created Adam from the skin (*adama*) of the earth, from «clinging clay (*ṭīn lāzib*)» (37:11)

«from foetid mud» (15: 26 and 33) with His hands, thus granting him honours, making his position magnificent, and ennobling him above the rest of His creation.

Ibn Ishāq added: It is said, and God knows best, that God created Adam, then He set him down and observed him for 40 years before He breathed His spirit into him, so that he became dry clay like pottery without being fired. (...) When the spirit went into his head, he sneezed, and said: 'Praise be to God', and his Lord said to him: 'May your Lord have mercy on you.' When he stood up the angels prostrated before him, remembering God's compact which He had made with them, and obeying the command which He had given them. But the enemy of God, Iblīs, stood up among them and did not prostrate—arrogantly, haughtily, feeling outrage and envy. 「God」 said to him: «Iblīs, what prevented you from prostrating before what I have created with My own hands . . . I shall assuredly fill Gehenna with you, and with whosoever of them follows you, all together.» (38: 75-85)

(...)When God had finished with Iblīs and with reproving him, and he persisted in his disobedience, He cursed him and exiled him from the Garden. Then He turned towards Adam—and He had taught him all the names—and said: «Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth? And I know what things you reveal, and what you have been concealing.» «They said: 'Glory be to You! We know not save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise', i.e., 'We answered You only in accordance with what You have taught us, but as for what You have not taught us, You are the more knowing in that. And the name Adam gave a thing remained its name until the Day of the Resurrection. [615]

(..)

A 「certain」 Arabic scholar said that the angels did not say «Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood?» in contestation of their Lord, but that they asked him so that they would understand, and they said that they praised Him. He said that they said this because they abhorred that God should be disobeyed, because the jinn had been commanded before this and had disobeyed. Another has

said that this was a request for guidance from the angels about what they did not understand about this. . . .

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most preferable of these interpretations of God's words reporting what the angels said to Him, 'viz.,' «Will You place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?» is that of him who said that this was an inquiry which they made of their Lord, meaning: 'Teach us, our Lord, are You going to place someone with this attribute, and are You not going to place a vicegerent from among us, who proclaim Your praise and call You holy?' They did not contest what their Lord had taught them He would do, although they were dismayed when they were informed of that, that God would have a creature who would disobey Him.

As for the claim that God allowed them to ask about this, and that they then asked Him in a way 'which expressed' astonishment, there is no evidence for it in the ostensive meaning of the revelation, nor any Tradition from an authority which would be decisive; and it is not permissible to hold a view about the interpretation of the Book of God for which there is no evidence from any of the ways in which a proof can be established.

§ Ṭabarī considers the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd [607], supported also by Qatāda [609], to be acceptable, i.e., that God informed the angels that He was placing on earth a vicegerent whose offspring would cause corruption, and that the angels put their question as a mere enquiry, in accordance with Ṭabarī's view. He does not dismiss as erroneous the view expressed elsewhere by Ibn 'Abbās [606], followed by al-Rabī' b. Anas [613], that the angels were asking whether the vicegerent would be like the previous inhabitants of the earth, i.e., the jinn, nor the view of Ibn Zaid [614] that the angels were expressing amazement that God had creatures who disobeyed Him. But he does dismiss them on the grounds, mentioned above, that there is no clear proof that they are correct. In such cases, he says, the best interpretation is the one which is supported by the ostensive meaning of the revelation.

To the objection that there is no mention in the Qur'ān of God saying that His creation on earth would be corrupt and shed blood (implying that the ostensive meaning of the text does not support his preferred interpretation), Ṭabarī replies that such a direct quotation is not needed because it is clear to the reader that it has been omitted and that he should therefore supply it himself, and he supports this as being a common stylistic device in Arabic by giving a poetic example.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-NAḤNU NUSABBIḤU
BI-ḤAMDI-KA

As for His words «'while we proclaim Your praise'», He means 'we glorify You by praising You and giving 'You' thanks'; as He has said: «Then proclaim the praise of your Lord» (110: 3), and as He has said: «when the angels proclaim the praise of their Lord» (42: 5). All remembrance of God according to the Arabs is praise and prayer, . . . and it has been said that praise is the prayer of the angels.

⇒Sa'īd b. Jubair:

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was praying, when a Muslim passed a hypocrite, and said to him: 'The Prophet is praying and you are sitting!' But he said to him: 'Go away about your business, if you have any business.' So he said: 'I do not doubt that someone will pass by you and rebuke you.'

Then 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb passed by him, and said to him: 'O so-and-so, the Prophet is praying and you are sitting!' And he said the same thing to him, so he said: 'This is my business.' Then he pounced upon him and beat him till he had done with him. Then he entered the mosque and prayed with the Prophet. When the Prophet was leaving, 'Umar went up to him and said: 'O Prophet, I passed so-and-so before while you were praying, and I said to him: "The Prophet is praying and you are sitting down!" And he said: "Amuse yourself with your own business, if you have any business."' Then the Prophet said to him: 'Would you not cut his neck?' So 'Umar got up quickly. Then 'the Prophet' said: 'O 'Umar, come back. Indeed your anger is power, but your good will is authority. God has angels in the seven heavens praying; He has no need of the prayer of so-and-so.' 'Umar said: 'O Prophet of God, what is their prayer?', but he did not give him any reply. Then Gabriel came to him and said: 'O Prophet, did 'Umar ask you about the prayer of the inhabitants of heaven?' He said: 'Yes.' Then he said: 'Give 'Umar greetings, and tell him that the inhabitants of the lowest heaven are prostrated until the Day of the Resurrection, saying: "Praise be to Him Who has dominion and sovereignty!", and the inhabitants of the second heaven are bent 'in prayer' (*rukū*) until the Day of the Resurrection, saying: "Praise be to Him who has power and might!", and the inhabitants of the third heaven are standing 'in prayer' until the

Day of the Resurrection, saying: "Praise be to the Living One who never dies!" [617; see also ⇒Abū Dharr, from the Prophet, 618]

There are similar Traditions to these, but we do not wish to prolong the book by examining them all.

The basic meaning of *tasbīḥ* (=praise) among the Arabs is 'declaring Him above any connection with attributes which are not His, proclaiming that He is free of these.'†

The interpreters differed about the meaning of 'proclaiming praise and calling 'God' holy' in this place. Some said it means 'We pray to You' [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 619], while others said it means the familiar 'kind of' praise [⇒Qatāda, 620].

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-NUQADDISU LA-KA

Taqdīs (=calling God holy) is calling 'Him' pure and mighty. . . . And so the meaning of the angels' saying «we proclaim Your praise» is 'we declare You to be above, and proclaim that You are free from, what the polytheists ascribe to You; and we pray to You and «call You holy», ascribing to You purity from uncleanness and from what those who do not believe in You ascribe to You; and 'this purity' is one of Your attributes.' And it is said that the angels calling their Lord holy is their praying to Him [⇒Qatāda, 621]. Some said that «we call You holy» means 'we magnify and glorify You' [*inter alios* ⇒Mujāhid, 623].

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLA INNĪ A' LAMU MĀ LAM TA' LAM ŪNA

[T]: Some said He means that which is known to Him about Iblīs and his concealing disobedience to God and his keeping his arrogance secret, but which is hidden to the angels [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 626, 627; ⇒Mujāhid, 628-35]. Others said it means: «I know what you do not know», that from that vicegerent 'Adam' will come people of obedience and nearness (*wilāya*) to God [⇒Qatāda, 639].

This statement of God relates that the angels who said «'Will You place thereon one who will do corruption there and shed blood?'» found it shocking that God should have a creature who disobeys Him. . . . So their Lord said to them «'I know what you do not know'», meaning

thereby, and God knows best: 'You are amazed at God's command and are shocked by it, and I know what some of you 'think', and that you describe yourselves with an attribute when I know that one of you has the opposite 'attribute', and that you suggest 'that you deserve' the command I have given to another besides you.' That is to say that when their Lord told the angels of the corruption and bloodshed which would result from the offspring of His vicegerent, they said to 'Him': 'O Lord, will You place a vicegerent on earth, from someone other than us and among whose offspring are some who will disobey You, or from us, who glorify You, pray to You, and obey You and do not disobey You?' But they did not know the arrogance towards his Lord which was hidden in Iblīs's breast. So their Lord said to them: 'I know that one of you thinks differently from what you say', and that was the 'knowledge' that was hidden to them of the affair of Iblīs, and of the arrogance which he had kept secret. So they were reproved for saying this, and for describing themselves with this generalized description.

¹ Sh. & Sh., I, 439, n. 1, where it is mentioned that Abū 'Ubaida's argument might rather have been about the related particle *idhā*.

² For these locations near the Ka'ba, see *Exeg.* 2: 125.

³ See 15: 27.

⁴ See 55: 15.

⁵ See 37: 11.

⁶ See 15: 26, 28, and 33.

⁷ See *Intro.*, p. 47.

⁸ There is clearly a confusion in this and the preceding Tradition between 'al-ḥinn' and 'al-jinn', not only in the printed editions of Ṭabarī (see Sh. & Sh., I, 455, n. 1, and 459, n. 1), but also in the Traditions themselves, no doubt arising in part from the similarity in written forms of the two words, which differ only in a diacritical point. But underlying this is an ambiguity, going back to the Qur'ān itself, about whether Iblīs was an angel (see 2: 34) or a jinn (see 18: 50). Creationally, the jinn are distinguished from the angels, either, as in the preceding Tradition, because of the different substances out of which they were made, or for other reasons (see, e.g., below [613]); according to the preceding Tradition, Iblīs and his tribe were angels but were made from a certain fire rather than from light, from which the other angels were made, and were in this respect closer to the jinn. For Ṭabarī's elucidation of this point, see *Exeg.* 2: 34, pp. 239-41.

⁹ Also, as a name of God, = the Steadfast, the Refuge.

2: 31

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ
فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

*wa-'allama Ādama 'l-asmā'a kulla-hā thumma 'araḍahum 'ala
'l-malā'ikati fa-qāla anbi'ūni bi-asmā'i hā'ulā'i in kuntum ṣādiqīna*

And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them to the angels, and said: 'Now tell me the names of these, if you speak the truth.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'ALLAMA ĀDAMA

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Lord of all might sent the angel of death, and he took some of the surface (*adīm*) of the earth, part sweet 'soil' and part brackish. And He created Adam from it. For that reason he was called Adam, because he was created from the surface (*adīm*) of the earth. [640]

(..)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

When the angel of death was sent to take the soil of Adam from the earth, he took from the face of the earth, and he mixed 'it' and did not take it from 'only' one place; he took red, white, and black earth, and that is why human beings came out different 'colours'. That is why he was called Adam, because he was taken from the surface (*adīm*) of the earth. [644]

There is a Tradition related from the Messenger of God which confirms what those we have narrated from have said about the meaning of 'Adam'.

⇒ Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'God created Adam from a handful which He had taken from all over the earth. The children of Adam came according to the

earth: among them came the red-coloured, the black, the white, and what is in between; the smooth and the rough; the wicked and the good. [645]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF AL-ASMĀ'A KULLA-HĀ

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«He taught Adam the names, all of them», which are the names with which mankind is familiar: 'man', 'animal', 'earth', 'plateau', 'sea', 'mountain', 'donkey', and 'all' the nations 'of creatures', and so forth, like these. [646, part of 606 above]

⇒ Mujāhid, concerning this verse:

He taught him the name of every thing. [647 and 648]

§ Other Traditions quoted by Ṭabarī give the same opinion, but give other examples along the lines of [646] above; e.g., 'crow' and 'pigeon' [⇒ Mujāhid, 649]; 'camel', 'cow', and 'sheep' [⇒ Sa'id b. Jubair, 650]; and, at the other end of the scale, *hana* and its diminutive *hunaiya*, both meaning a 'small thing' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 653], and *faswa* and its diminutive *fusaiya*, both words for the breaking of wind [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 651-4].

(...)

⇒ Qatāda:

«And He taught Adam the names, all of them». He taught him the name of everything: 'This is a "mountain"', 'This is a "sea"', and so forth, for everything. Then He presented these things to the angels and said: «'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth.'» [656]

(..)

SECOND OPINION: Another [⇒ Al-Rabī', 659] said that «He taught Adam the names, all of them», 'means' the names of the angels.

THIRD OPINION: Another [⇒ Ibn Zaid, 660] said that He taught him the names of all his offspring.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most correct of these views, the closest to

what the ostensive meaning of the text indicates to be true, is the view of the one who said that . . . 'it means' the names of his offspring and the names of the angels, and not the names of the other kinds of creatures. That is to say, God said: «Then He presented (*araḍa*-) them (*-hum*) to the angels», meaning thereby the real instances of the things named by those names which He had taught Adam. Now the Arabs hardly ever refer to anything by *-hum* except the names of humans and angels. They refer 'to all other things' . . . by *-hā*', in the singular, or *-hunna*', in the plural'. . . Sometimes *-hum* is used, as in His words: «God has created every beast of water, and some of them (*min-hum*) go upon their bellies, and some of them (*min-hum*) go upon their two feet, and some of them (*min-hum*) go upon four», when they are 'a combination of' various categories including men and other things.

§ Ṭabarī allows, however, the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās [646], in which he gives examples from categories of creatures other than man and the angels, and suggests that he was perhaps interpreting according to the recension of Ubaiy, who has '*araḍa-hā*'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA 'ARAḌA-HUM 'ALA 'L-MALĀ' IKA

We have already mentioned the preferable interpretation of the verse according to our reading and to the script of our copy (*muṣḥaf*) 'of the Qur'ān', and have said that «then He presented them» indicates humans and angels, rather than all the kinds of creatures, although it is not incorrect 'to say' that it indicates all the categories of the nations 'of creatures' for the reasons we have described. And He means by His words «then He presented them»: 'Then He presented the people called by the 'se' names to the angels.'

[T]: The commentators differed about the interpretation of His words «then He presented them to the angels» in the same way as they differed about His words «He taught Adam the names, all of them.» . . .

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'T'hen He presented them to the angels»: Then He presented these names, i.e., the names of all the things which He had taught to Adam, of the categories of all creatures. [661]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«'T'hen He presented them»: Then He presented the creatures to the angels. [662, part of 607]

(. .)

⇒ Mujāhid:

«'T'hen He presented them»: He presented the bearers of the names to the angels. [665]

(. .)

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-QĀLA ANBI'ŪNĪ BI-ASMĀ' I HĀ'ULĀ' I

¶ 'Now inform me 'of the names of these'.' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 668]‡

⇒ Mujāhid:

'«The names of these»: The names of these things about which I have told Adam. [669, 670]

THE INTERPRETATION OF IN KUNTUM ŠĀDIQĪNA

[T]:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'I'f you speak the truth»—if you know why I am placing a vicegerent on earth.' [671, part of 606 above]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

«'I'f you speak the truth» about the children of Adam being workers of corruption and shedders of blood.' [672, part of 607 above]

⇒ 'Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī' and Qatāda:

«'Now tell Me the names of these, if you speak the truth» about My not creating anything which is more knowing than you. [673, part of 611 above]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferable view about the interpretation of the verse is that of Ibn 'Abbās [671 and 672] and those who hold his view.

¶ 'Now tell me the names of what I have presented to you—you

angels who said: «“Will you place thereon one who will work corruption there and shed blood» who is not one of us, or one of us who proclaim Your praise and call You Holy?”—if you speak the truth when you say that I am placing on earth My vicegerent who is not one of you and whose offspring will disobey Me and work corruption there and shed blood, whereas if I placed you there you would obey me and follow My command by praising Me and calling Me holy. Now, if you do not know the names of these things which I have presented to you, which are existing, created things you can see in front of your own eyes, and ‘if’ someone besides you knows them through My having taught him, ‘then you must agree that’ it is all the more ‘likely to be the case’ that you should not know about created, but not yet existing, things, and about existing things which are hidden from your eyes. So do not ask of Me things which you do not know about; I know better what is proper for you and what is proper for My creatures.’

From the point of view of His reprimanding the angels who said ‘this’ . . . , God’s action towards them is similar to what He said to His prophet Noah, may God’s blessings be upon him, when he said¹, asking God to save his son¹: ‘O my Lord, my son is of my family, and Your promise is surely the truth. You are the most just of those who judge.’» (11: 45) ‘God said: ‘Do not ask of Me what you do not know about. I admonish you, lest you should be among the ignorant.’ Likewise, the angels asked their Lord that they should be His vicegerents on earth because they would praise Him and call Him holy there, for the offspring of the one He had told them He was placing as His vicegerent on earth would work corruption there and shed blood. And He said to them: ‘Assuredly I know what you do not know’, meaning thereby: ‘I know that one of you is the opener and sealer of all sin, and he is Iblīs’, thereby denying what they had said. Thus He let them know where they had gone wrong in what they had said about this, by making known to them the insufficiency of their knowledge about His existing creatures, which He had presented to them that day and which they could see with their own eyes; how, then, could they know what they could not see and what they had not been informed about? And He said to them: ‘Now tell Me the names of these if you speak the truth’ ‘when you say’ that if I appoint you as vicegerents on My earth you will praise Me and call Me holy, and that if I appoint there someone besides you his offspring will disobey Me, work corruption, and shed blood.’ When He had made clear to them where they had been

mistaken in what they had said, . . . they turned in repentance to God, and said: ‘Glory be to You! We know not save what You have taught us’, . . . just as Noah said, when he was reproved for his request . . . : ‘My Lord, I take refuge with You, lest I should ask of You what I have no knowledge of; for if You forgive me not, and do not have mercy on me, I shall be among the losers.’» (11: 47) This is what everyone who is successfully guided to the truth does, whose turning to it is swift, and whose return to it is without delay.

One of the Baṣran grammarians claimed that His words «Now tell me the names of these if you speak truly» were not spoken because the angels had claimed anything, but were a statement by God about their ignorance of any knowledge of the unperceivable, and of His knowledge of this and His superiority, . . . ‘that it was’ like one man saying to another ‘Tell me about this, then, if you know’, when he knows he does not know, meaning that he is ignorant. . . .

There is no doubt that «*in kuntum ṣādiqīn*» . . . ‘refers to truth’ either in what one says or in what one does, because *ṣidq* in the speech of the Arabs means ‘being truthful in what one states’, not ‘having true knowledge’. That is to say, it is not intelligible in any language to say that someone is truthful in what he knows. It is thus a necessary consequence that God said ‘this’ to the angels . . . knowing that they were not being truthful, and meaning that they were lying. But this is just what ‘this grammarian’ denied, because he claimed that the angels were not claiming anything. . . . ‘Moreover’ this opinion . . . is not one of the opinions of any of the ancient or modern interpreters or exegetes.

§ Ṭabarī also rejects an exegete’s understanding that «*in kuntum ṣādiqīna*» means ‘since (*idh*) you speak the truth’, on the ground that, if this were the meaning, the reading would have to be «*an kuntum ṣādiqīn*»; but no reciter of the Qur’ān ever read it like this.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ
الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

*qālū subhāna-ka lā 'ilma la-nā illā mā 'allamta-nā inna-ka anta
'l- 'alīmu 'l-ḥakīmu*

They said: 'Glory be to You! We know only what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'

THIS is a statement by God about His angels returning to Him, admitting that only He had knowledge of what they did not know, and disclaiming that they knew, or that any one of them knew, anything apart from what He had taught them [see ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 606].

In these three verses¹, i.e., 30 to 31,² there is a warning for him who would give heed, a reminder for him who would recall, and an elucidation (*bayān*) for him who has a heart 'with which to understand' or would give ear with a present mind,¹ of the subtle wisdoms which God sets forth in the verses of this Qur'ān, and which the tongues 'of men' are incapable of describing. Which is to say that God vindicated His prophet against the Jews of the Children of Israel who lived around him by informing him of the knowledge of the unperceivable which He gives only to the elite (*khaṣṣ*) among His creatures, and which can only be understood through 'divine' communication and notification, so that 'the question of' the truthfulness of his prophethood might be resolved for them, and they might know that what he brought was from Him. Therein He demonstrated that whosoever states something about what has been, or about a created thing which has not 'yet' happened, for which he can bring forward no report (*khābar*), and for the truth of which he can produce no proof, is fabricating lies which necessarily merit punishment for him from his Lord.

Do you not see that God refuted what His angels said—'Will you place therein one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?'—'and' said: 'Assuredly I know what you do not know.' He let them know that it was not permissible for them to say that, by informing them of the insufficiency of their knowledge when He presented them with the

bearers of the names which He presented to them, saying: «'Now tell me the names of these, if you speak the truth.'» There was no refuge for them but to avow 'their' inability and disclaim before Him that they knew anything apart from what He had taught them: «'Glory be to You! We know only what You have taught us.'»

In this is the clearest indication, and the most manifest proof, of the falsity of the claims of all foretellers of the future (*ḥuzāt*), all soothsayers (*kahāna*),² ornithomancers ('*āfa*), and astrologers to know anything of the unperceivable.

Through this 'verse, God' reminded those of the people of scripture whom we have described of His previous blessings upon their forefathers, and of the help He had given their ancestors when they turned to Him in repentance and obedience, thereby urging them to turn to right guidance and satisfying them that they should seek salvation. And He warned them that by persisting in transgression and errancy they would incur punishment, like that which befell His enemy, Iblīs, when he persisted in ignorance and error.

§ For the meaning of 'praise' see above, *Exeg.* 2: 30, *sabbāḥa*.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INNA-KA ANTA 'L-'ALĪMU 'L-ḤAKĪMU

¶ 'Indeed You, our Lord, and not any of Your creatures, are the Knower (*al-'alīm*) without being taught, of all that which is and which will be, the Knower (*al-'ālim*) of the unperceivable.'

'The angels' denied . . . that they had any knowledge except what their Lord had taught them, but affirmed that 'the knowledge' which they denied having themselves belonged to their Lord by saying «'You are the All-knowing'», meaning 'the One who knows without being taught, when none besides You knows anything except through someone else teaching him' . . .

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Al-'alīm is one who has reached perfection in his knowledge, and *al-ḥakīm* is one who has reached perfection in his judgement. [675]

(...)

¹ See 50: 37.

² See *Intro.*, n. 12.

قَالَ يٰٓآدَمُ اَنْبِئْهُمْ بِاسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّ اَنْبَاَهُمْ بِاسْمَائِهِمْ
 قَالَ اَلَمْ اَقُلْ لَّكُمْ اِنِّىۤ اَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ
 وَاَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُوْنَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُوْنَ

*qāla yā-Ādamu anbi'-hum bi-asmā'i-him fa-lammā anba'a-hum bi-
 asmā'i-him qāla a-lam aqul la-kum inn-ī a'lamu ghaiba 'l-samāwāti
 wa-'l-arḍi wa-a'lamu mā tubdūna wa-mā kuntum taktumūna*

He said: 'Adam, tell them their names.' And when he had told them their names, He said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth? And I know what things you reveal and what you were concealing.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLA YĀ-ĀDAMU ANBI'-HUM
 BI-ASMĀ'I-HIM FA-LAMMĀ ANBA'A-HUM BI-ASMĀ'I-HIM
 QĀLA A-LAM AQUL LA-KUM INN-Ī A'LAMU GHAIBA
 'L-SAMĀWĀTI WA-'L-ARḌI

(...)

As for the interpretation of His words «He said: 'Adam, tell them'», He means: 'tell the angels . . . «their names'», i.e., the names of those whom He presented to the angels. «And when he had told them»: 'When Adam had told the angels the names of those whom He had presented to them, and they did not know their names, and were convinced of their mistake . . ., their Lord said to them «“Did I not tell you that I know the unperceivable things of the heavens and the earth?”»' And the unperceivable things are what was hidden from their eyes and they could not see. God was rebuking them for this, with respect to what they had said before, and to the error of their question which they had let slip. [=Ibn 'Abbās, 606]

(..)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-A'LAMU MĀ TUBDŪNA
 WA-MĀ KUNTUM TAKTUMŪNA

[T] FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«'And I know what things you reveal'»—i.e., 'what you disclose'—«'and what you were concealing'»—i.e., 'I know what is secret just as I know what is open', that is, the arrogance and deceit that Iblīs was concealing in his soul. [678; see also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 607]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Mahdī b. Maimūn:

I heard al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār say to al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī', while we were sitting with 'this latter' in his house: 'Abū Sa'īd, have you seen what God said to the angels: “I know what things you reveal, and what you were concealing”? What were the angels concealing?' Al-Ḥasan said: 'When God created Adam, the angels saw 'this' marvellous creature, and it was as if something got into them on account of this, and they turned to each other and said, keeping this secret among themselves: “What troubles you of this creature? God will never create any creature which is nobler before Him than us.”' [682; see also ⇒Qatāda, 683; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 684]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferable opinion about the interpretation of this verse is that of Ibn 'Abbās who said, . . . 'I know what you declare with your tongues, . . . and what you conceal in your souls; and nothing is concealed from me. Alike with me is what you keep secret and what you make open.' What they declared with their tongues was . . . their saying: «'Will you place therein one who will work corruption there and shed blood, while we proclaim Your praise and call You holy?'», and what they were keeping concealed was the opposition to God concerning His command, and the arrogance 'which prevented' obedience to Him, which Iblīs kept hidden within himself.

§ Ṭabarī argues that there are only two interpretations for this passage: that of Ibn 'Abbās [678], which he prefers, and that of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī [682]. There is, he says, no 'incontrovertible evidence' for the latter of these two opinions, either from the Qur'ān or from a Tradition, whereas what God says

about Iblīs does provide such proof for the former opinion. He then gives an argument based on the linguistic usage of the Arabs, quoting another Qur'ānic verse, 49: 4, as an example, that it is permissible to refer to one member of a group, in this case, Iblīs, by employing the word for the group as a whole, thus justifying Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation.

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وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ
أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

*wa-idh qulnā li-'l-malā'ikati 'sjudū li-Ādama fa-sajadū illā Iblīsa abā
wa-'stakbara wa-kāna mina 'l-kāfirīna*

And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated, save Iblīs; he refused and waxed proud, and so he became one of the unbelievers.

HIS words «And when We said . . .» are connected with His words «And when your Lord said to the angels . . .».¹ It is as if He were saying to the Jews of the Children of Israel who inhabited the place of the Messenger's emigration¹, i.e., Medina¹, while enumerating His blessings to them and reminding them of His favours, as we have previously described: 'Recall what I did for you when I bestowed My blessings on you. I created all that is in the earth for you. And 'recall' when I said to the angels that I was placing a vicegerent on earth, and honoured your forefather Adam with My knowledge, and My 'marks of' favour and generosity, which I granted him. And 'recall' when I made the angels prostrate before him, and they did.'

Then He made Iblīs an exception from all the 'angels', and showed, by doing this, that he was 'in fact' one of them, and that he had been commanded to prostrate with them, as He says: «save Iblīs—he was not of those who prostrated. * He said: 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?'» (7: 11–12). So God stated that He commanded Iblīs to prostrate before Adam, among the angels whom He had commanded. Then He excepted him from what He stated about their having prostrated before Adam, disqualified him

from His description of them as obedient to His command, and negated of him the 'act of' prostration before His servant, Adam, which He had affirmed of His angels.

[T]: WAS 'IBLĪS' ONE OF THE ANGELS, OR NOT?: FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Before Iblīs disobeyed 'God', he was one of the angels and his name was 'Azāzīl. He dwelt on earth, and was one of the angels who strived the hardest and had the most knowledge, and it was this that gave rise to his arrogance. He was from a tribe (*ḥaiy*) who were called 'Jinn'. [686, and a similar report, 687. See also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 606]

(. .)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Iblīs was among the illustrious of the angels and of their most noble tribe. He was a treasurer of the Gardens, and he had authority over the heaven of this world, and . . . over the earth. . . . 'God' said «he was one of the jinn» (18: 50), and he was named 'a *jinnī*' after the Gardens (*jinān*) whose treasurer he was, just as men are called Makkī 'from Mecca', Madanī 'from Medina', Kūfī 'from Kūfa' and Baṣrī 'from Baṣra'. [689; see also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒A group of Companions, 607]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Of the angels there was a tribe (*qabīla*) of al-Jinn, and Iblīs was one of them. He ruled over what was between heaven and earth. [690; see also 691]

(. .)

⇒Qatāda:

«And when we said to the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated, save Iblīs; he was one of the Jinn», he was from the tribe of the angels who were called 'Jinn'. Ibn 'Abbās said: 'If he had not been an angel, he would not have been commanded to prostrate. He was in command of the treasury of the heaven of this world.' . . . He hid (*janna*) from obedience to his Lord. [693, see also 694]

⇒Muḥammad b. Ishāq:

Now the Arabs say that a 'jinn' is anyone who hides himself (*ijtanṇa*, VIIIth form of *janna*) and is not seen. As for His words: «save Iblīs; he was one of the jinn», He means he was one of the angels, that is to say that the angels hide themselves and are not seen. God said: «They have set up a kinship between Him and the jinn, and the jinn know that they shall be arraigned» (37: 158), and this was due to Quraish saying: 'The angels are the daughters of God.' So God says: 'If the angels were my daughters, then Iblīs would be one of them. They have set up a kinship between Me and Iblīs and his offspring.' (...) God called 'them' *jinn* because they hid themselves (*ijtanṇū*) and were not seen, and He calls the children of Adam *ins* (= mankind) because they are visible and do not hide themselves.² Whatever is visible is *ins*, and whatever hides itself and is not seen is *jinn*. [695]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī:

Iblīs was never for one moment one of the angels. He was the stock (*aṣl*) of the jinn, just as Adam was the stock of mankind. [696]

⇒Qatāda:

Al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī used to say about His words «save Iblīs; he was one of the jinn»: 'He traced him back to his genealogical origins. God says: «What, and do you take him and his seed to be your friends, apart from Me, and they are an enemy to you? How evil is that exchange for the evildoers!» (18: 50) They reproduce like the children of Adam reproduce. [697]

(..)

⇒Sa'd b. Mas'ūd:

The angels were fighting with the jinn, and Iblīs was captured when he was young. So he was with the angels and worshiped with them. When they were commanded to prostrate before Adam, they prostrated, but Iblīs refused, and that is why God said «save Iblīs; he was one of the jinn». [699]

(..)

⇒Ibn Zaid:

Iblīs is the father of the jinn, as Adam is the father of mankind. [701]

ṬABARĪ'S COMMENTS: The reason people held this 'latter' opinion 'that Iblīs was not an angel' is that God stated in His Book that He created Iblīs from the fire of the Samūm (15: 27) and from a smokeless fire (55: 15), but did not state that He created the angels from anything like that. And God states that he was of the jinn, so they said that it is not possible that he should be related to that which God does not relate him to; they said that Iblīs had progeny and offspring, but the angels do not procreate or have children.

(..)

But these reasons only bespeak the weakness of these people's knowledge, for there is nothing objectionable in 'the assumption' that God should have created the categories of His angels from all kinds of things that He had created: He created some of them from light, some of them from fire, and some of them from what He willed apart from that. There is thus nothing in God's omitting to state what He created His angels from, and in His stating what He created Iblīs from, which necessarily implies that Iblīs is outside the meaning of 'angel', for it is possible that He created a category of His angels, among whom was Iblīs, from fire, and even that Iblīs was unique in that He created him, and no other angel of His, from the fire of the Samūm.

Likewise, he cannot be excluded from being an angel by the fact that he had progeny or offspring, because passion and lust, from which the other angels were free, was compounded in him when God willed disobedience in him. As for God's statement that he was «one of the jinn», it is not to be rejected that everything which hides itself (*ijtanṇa*) from sight is a 'jinn', . . . and Iblīs and the angels should then be 'included' among them, because they hide themselves from the eyes of mankind.

THE MEANING OF IBLĪS

Iblīs is 'a noun of the form' *if'il* from 'the IVth form verb' *ablasa*, which 'means' 'to despair of good', 'to feel remorse', 'to grieve' [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 606].

(..)

⇒ Al-Suddī:

The name of Iblīs was al-Hārith, and he was called Iblīs when he despaired and was confounded. [704]

As God said: «We seized them suddenly,¹ and behold, they despaired (*mublisūn*)» (6: 44), meaning thereby that they gave up all hope of good, and felt remorse and grief.[‡]

OBJECTION: If 'Iblīs' is, as you have said, 'of the form' *if'īl* from *ablasa*, why is it imperfectly declined?²

REPLY: It is imperfectly declined because it is heavy on the ear, for it is a word which has no parallel among Arabic words, and, since this was so, the Arabs compared it to non-Arabic words, which are imperfectly declined. . . . 'Similarly they do not decline the noun *Ishāq* fully': it comes from 'the IVth form verb *ashaqa* as in' 'God removed (*ashaqa*) him'; it first occurred as a name for non-Arabs, and subsequently Arabs were given it as a name, and it followed the same rules of desinential inflexion—being one of the names of non-Arabs—and was not fully declined. Similarly 'Aiyūb', which has the form *fai'ūl* from 'the verb' *āba* (= to return to God, to repent).

¶ «He refused», i.e., Iblīs . . . refused to prostrate before Adam, and did not do so; «and he waxed proud», i.e., he was too haughty and arrogant to obey God and prostrate before Adam.

Although this is a statement by God about Iblīs, it is 'also' a rebuke to those creatures of God who are like him and are too arrogant to follow the command of God, to acquiesce in obedience to what He commands and forbids them to do, and to submit to Him in the rights between them that He has imposed 'on them'.⁴ Among those 'like this' . . . were the Jews who inhabited the abode of migration 'Medina' of the Messenger of God, and their rabbis who were aware of the Messenger and his attributes, and knew that he was a Messenger of God. Despite their knowledge of this, they arrogantly refused to affirm his prophethood and to submit in obedience to him, revolting against him and envying him. So God rebuked them by means of His statement about Iblīs, who revolted and acted enviously in arrogantly refusing to prostrate before Adam, just as they revolted and acted enviously in arrogantly refusing to submit to Muḥammad, the prophet of God, and his prophethood, when he brought them the truth from their Lord.

Then He described Iblīs in the likeness of those for whom He coined him as a metaphor of arrogant, jealous, and haughty refusal to submit to whomsoever He commanded him to submit, and said «and so he», i.e., Iblīs, «became one of the unbelievers», one of those who deny God's blessings and favours towards him, by opposing Him in His command to him to prostrate before Adam. In the same way, the Jews denied the blessings which their Lord had bestowed upon them and their forefathers before, 'such as' God's feeding their ancestors with manna and quails and shading them with clouds,⁵ and innumerable other blessings of His to them, especially when He favoured those who came in touch with Muḥammad with their contact with him and with their witnessing God's proof for them; then they denied his prophethood, through rebellion and jealousy, after coming to know of him and his prophethood.

So God linked him with the unbelievers, and made him one of their number in religion and faith, although he differed from them in kind and kinship. In the same way, He made the hypocrites as one another, because they were united by hypocrisy, although they differed genealogically and in kind, when He said: «The hypocrites, the men and the women, are as one another» (9: 67), meaning thereby that they resembled one another in hypocrisy and errancy. Similarly, He said about Iblīs that he was one of the unbelievers, that he was one of them with respect to disbelief in God and opposition to His command, although he was different in kind and kinship from them. The meaning of «and so he became one of the unbelievers» is that, when he refused to prostrate, he became one of the unbelievers. . . .

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

«And he became one of the unbelievers»,¹ i.e., 'one of' the rebellious (*al-āṣūn*). [705, 706]

This is similar to the meaning we have given.

The angels' prostration before Adam was 'an act of' deference towards Adam and 'of' obedience to God, not 'one of' worshipping Adam.

⇒ Qatāda:

«And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate before Adam', the obedience was to God, and the prostration towards Adam:

God honoured Adam by making His angels prostrate before him.
[707]

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 30, pp. 206–7.

² The IVth form verb *ānasa* means 'to see'.

³ See *Trans Intro.*, p. xx.

⁴ Islamic law recognizes rights between humans (as distinguished from rights of God, see above *Intro.*, n. 49), which are instituted by God.

⁵ See 2: 57 and 7: 160.

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وَقُلْنَا يٰٓآدَمُ اَسْكُنْ اَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا
حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

*wa-qulnā yā-Ādamu 'skun anta wa-zauju-ka 'l-jannata wa-kulā
min-hā raghadan ḥaithu shi'tumā wa-lā taqrabā hādhihi 'l-shajarata
fa-takūnā min al-ẓālimīna*

And We said: 'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but do not draw near this tree, lest you become evil-doers.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-QULNĀ YĀ-ĀDAMU*
'*SKUN ANTA WA-ZAUJA-KA 'L-JANNA*

IN this verse there is a clear indication of the correctness of the opinion of those who say that Iblīs was exiled from the Garden after he had arrogantly refused to prostrate before Adam, and that Adam was put to dwell there before Iblīs fell to earth. Do you not hear God saying: «And We said: 'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but do not draw near this tree, lest you become evil-doers.' * Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom, and brought them out of that wherein they were.» It is clear that Iblīs caused them to slip from obedience to God after he had been cursed and had demonstrated 'his' arrogance, because the angels' prostration before Adam came after the spirit had been breathed into him, and then Iblīs refused to prostrate before him, and for the refusal to do this the curse came down upon him.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

The enemy of God, Iblīs, swore by His might, that he would surely lead Adam, his offspring, and his wife, except for His sincere worshippers among them, astray, after God had cursed him, and after he had been exiled from the Garden, but before he fell to earth and God taught Adam all the names. [708]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

When God had finished with Iblīs and with reproving him, and he had refused 'to do anything' but disobey, and He had brought down the curse upon him, He exiled him from the Garden and turned towards Adam and taught him all the names, and then said: «'Adam, tell them their names.'»—up to (*sic*)—«'Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'» [709]

[T]: THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH ADAM'S WIFE WAS CREATED FOR HIM, AND THE TIME AT WHICH SHE WAS MADE A MEANS OF REPOSE (*SAKAN*) FOR HIM:

FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

Then Iblīs was exiled from the Garden when he was cursed, and Adam was put to dwell in the Garden. He went around alone with no wife in whom he could find repose. Then he fell asleep and woke up to find a woman sitting beside his head whom God had created from his rib. So he asked her: 'Who are you?' And she said: 'A woman.' He said: 'Why were you created?' She said: 'So that you could find repose in me.' Then the angels asked him, to see how much he knew: 'What is her name, Adam?' He said: *Ḥawā'* (=Eve). They said: 'Why is she called *Ḥawā'*?' He said: 'Because she was created from something living (*ḥaiy*).' Then God said to him: «'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire.'» [710]

This Tradition states that Eve was created after Adam had been dwelling in the Garden, and that she was created to be a means of repose for him.

SECOND OPINION: Others said that she was created before Adam dwelt in the Garden.

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

When God had finished reprimanding Iblīs, He turned to Adam and taught him all the names. Then He said «'Adam, tell them their names'»—up to (*sic*)—«'Surely You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.'» (...) Then He cast slumber upon Adam—according to what has reached us from the people of the Torah among the people of scripture, and from other people of knowledge, through 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās and others—and then He took one of his ribs from his left side, and joined together the place where it had been with flesh. 'Meanwhile' Adam slept, and he did not stir from his sleep until God had created his wife, Eve, from this rib of his. And He arranged her as a woman in whom 'Adam' could find repose. When his slumber was lifted from him, and he stirred from his sleep, he saw her beside him, and he said—according to what they claim, and God knows best—: 'My flesh, my blood, and my wife.' And he found repose in her. When God had duplicated him, and made a means of repose for him from himself, He spoke to him face to face: «'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but do not draw near this tree, lest you become evil-doers.'» [711]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-KULĀ MIN-HĀ RAGHADAN
HAITHU SHI' TUMĀ

Raghad is comfortableness in the means of living [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 716], a wholesomeness (*hanī'*) [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions, 712] which does not cause any distress to the one who has it.

⇒ Mujāhid, concerning *raghadan*:

They owed nothing 'for it'. [713-5]

¶ And We said: 'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat of the extensive and wholesome provision from the Garden where you wish.'

⇒ Qatāda:

He said: «'Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire.'» And the test which was

ordained for 'ali' creatures became ordained for Adam, just as the creatures before him had been put to the test. God made it licit for him to eat easefully whatever was in the Garden where he wished, except 'from' a single tree which He forbade him. And he was submitted to the test therein, and he continued to be tested up to the time he did what he had been forbidden to do. [717]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ TAQRABĀ
HĀDHIHI 'L-SHAJARA

Shajar (coll., sing. *shajara*) in the speech of the Arabs is every 'plant' which stands on a stem (*sāq*); God has said «and the *najm* and the *shajar* prostrate» (55: 6), meaning by *najm* the plants which spring 'directly' from 'the earth, and by *shajar* whatever is borne on a stem.

[T]: WHICH PARTICULAR *SHAJARA* WAS IT WHOSE FRUIT ADAM WAS FORBIDDEN TO EAT?: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said it was corn (*sunbula* = lit., a spike, or ear of grain) [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 718; ⇒ Abū Mālik, 719, 720; ⇒ 'Aṭīya, 721; ⇒ Qatāda, 722].

⇒ A man from the Banū Tamīm:

Ibn 'Abbās wrote to Abu 'l-Jald asking him about the *shajara* from which Adam ate, and about the *shajara* beside which he repented. Abu 'l-Jald wrote to him: 'You have asked me about the *shajara* which Adam was forbidden 'to eat': it was corn. And you have asked me about the *shajara* beside which Adam repented: it was the olive-tree.' [723]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The *shajara* which Adam was forbidden 'to eat' was wheat (*burr*). [724]

(...)

SECOND OPINION: Others said it was the vine (*karma*).

(...)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

It was the vine, but the Jews claim it was wheat (*ḥinṭa*). [731]

(...)

§ Other Traditions give 'grapes ('*inab*)' [*inter alia* ⇒Ja'da b. Hubaira, 733], 'wine-tree (*shajar al-khamr*)' [⇒Ja'da b. Hubaira, 736].

THIRD OPINION: Others said it was the fig-tree [⇒One of the Companions, 740].

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: Our opinion about this is that God informed his servants that Adam and his wife ate from a 'tree' from which their Lord had forbidden them to eat. By eating what they ate, they committed a sin which He had forbidden them to commit, after He had made clear to them which 'tree' He had forbidden them to eat from, and had pointed it out to them by saying: «'But do not draw near this tree.'» But God has provided His servants to whom the Qur'ān is addressed with no indication of which 'tree' of the Garden Adam was forbidden to approach, either through any textual proof (*naṣṣ*) of its name, or through any 'other kind of' indication. If God had approved of knowledge of which of these 'above possibilities' it was, He would not have deprived His servants of an indication of it by which they could arrive at knowledge of which one it was, so that they could submit to Him through their knowledge of it. This is what He does when He approves knowledge of anything.

The proper thing here is to say: God forbade Adam and his wife to eat of one particular 'tree', and not from any others, among the 'trees' of the Garden, but they went against what God had forbidden them, and ate from it as God described they had done. We have no knowledge about which 'tree' it was in particular, for God has not clearly indicated this to His servants either in the Qur'ān or in the sound *sunna*.¹ From where could this come then? It has been said that the 'tree' was wheat, and it has been said that it was the grape, and it has been said that it was the fig. It is possible that it was one of these, but that would be a piece of knowledge, having which would be of no use to the one who knew it, and not having which would do no harm to the one who did not know it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ TAQRABĀ

HĀDHIHI 'L-SHAJARA FA-TAKŪNĀ MINA 'L-ẒĀLIMĪNA

§ Ṭabarī gives two conflicting opinions for the grammatical interpretation of this passage. He cites a consensus of grammarians as proof against one opinion, that of a Baṣran grammarian, that the meaning is 'Let it not be that you draw near this tree, and do not become evil-doers', reading *takūnā* in the

apocopate, and not understanding any causal link between the two parts of the sentence. But he asserts the correctness of the other, that of a Kūfan grammarian, that it means 'Do not draw near this tree, for, if you do, you will become evil-doers', reading it in the subjunctive (= you will become), as part of a subordinate clause expressing the result which will come about from not following the prohibition expressed in the first clause.

The interpretation of «lest you become evil-doers» is 'lest you should be among those who go beyond what has been permitted them and what is licit for them therein'. By this He meant: 'If you draw near this tree, you will be 'following' the way of him who transgresses My limits, disobeys My order, and considers lawful what I have declared unlawful, because «the evil-doers are friends one of the other; God is the friend of the God-fearing.» (45: 19)

The basic meaning of *ẓulm* in the speech of the Arabs is to put something elsewhere than in its place.† Then *ẓulm* branched out into 'many' meanings, and to enumerate them would 'unduly' prolong 'our' book; we shall explain them in their places when we come to them, God willing. But the basic meaning of all of them is as we have described: putting something elsewhere than in its place.

¹ The *sunna* of Muḥammad, i.e., his words, deeds, or unspoken approval.

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فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ
وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُم لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ
مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ

fa-azalla-huma 'l-shaiṭānu 'an-hā fa-akhraja-humā mim-mā kānā fī-hi
wa-qulna 'hbiṭū ba'ḍu-kum li-ba'ḍin 'adūwun wa-la-kum fī 'l-arḍi
mustaqarrun wa-matā'un ilā hīnin

Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom, and brought them out of that they were in; and We said: 'Get you down, each of you an enemy of each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-AZALLA-HUMA
'L-SHAIṬĀNU 'AN-HĀ

[R]: FIRST OPINION: Most recited it «fa-azalla-humā» . . . , meaning 'he caused them to slip', with 'the meaning of ' to slip (zalla)' as in¹ one's saying that a man slipped in his religion, when he committed a lapse or made a mistake, and did what he should not have done, or that someone else caused him to slip when he was the cause of his slipping in his religion or in his world¹ly affairs¹. This is why God attributed the departure of Adam and his wife from the Garden to Iblīs. He said: «and 'he'¹ brought them out»—i.e., Iblīs did—«from that they were in», because it was he who caused them to make the mistake for which God punished them by expelling them from the Garden.

SECOND OPINION: Others recited it «fa-azāla-humā», with the meaning of 'removing (azāla)' something from something.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: It is narrated from Ibn 'Abbās concerning the interpretation of «fa-azalla-humā»:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«It means¹ he led them astray. [741]

The more correct of these two recitations is that of him who recited «fa-azalla-humā», because God states in the immediately subsequent passage that Iblīs «brought them out of what they were in» . . . , and there is no reason for Him to say «fa-azāla-humā», if *azāla* means 'to remove', and thus 'repeat Himself' . . . , as if he were to say 'He removed them from it and brought them out of that they were in' . . .

QUESTION: How did Iblīs cause Adam and his wife to slip, so that their expulsion from the Garden became attributed to him?

REPLY: The learned have voiced several opinions about this, and we shall mention some of them.

⇒ 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥrib:

I heard Wahb b. Munabbih say: 'When God settled Adam and his offspring'—or 'his wife', the doubt is from Abū Ja'far 'al-Ṭabarī', in the original copy of whose book is 'his offspring'—'and forbade him the tree, it was a tree whose branches were entangled, and which has fruit which the angels eat for their eternity; this was the fruit which God had forbidden Adam and his wife. When Iblīs desired to make them slip, he entered into the belly of the serpent. Now the serpent had four legs, as if it had been a Bactrian camel, one of the most beautiful beasts God created. When the serpent entered the Garden, Iblīs came out of its belly, took from the tree which God had forbidden Adam and his wife, and brought it to Eve. He said: 'Look at this tree! How fragrant it is, how delicious it is, what a beautiful colour it has!' So Eve took and ate of it, and then took it to Adam, and said: 'Look at this tree! How fragrant it is, how delicious it is, what a beautiful colour it has!' So Adam ate of it, and their shameful parts became conspicuous to them.

Then Adam went inside the tree, and his Lord called out: 'Adam, where are you?' (...) He said: 'I am here, O Lord.' He said: 'Are you not coming out?' He said: 'I feel ashamed before You, O Lord.' He said: 'Cursed be the earth from which you were created, may its fruit turn into thorns!' (...) Then there was no tree in the Garden or on earth which was better than the gum acacia and the Christ's thorn.¹ Then He said: 'Eve, you who misled My servant, may your pregnancies all be painful, and when you wish to give birth to what is in your womb, may you more than once look down on death!' Then He said to the serpent: 'You, into whose belly the cursed one entered so that he could mislead My servant,

cursed be you! May your legs withdraw into your abdomen. You shall have no sustenance but dust. You shall be the enemy of the children of Adam, and they shall be your enemies: when you meet one of them you will seize him by the heel, and when he meets you he will crush your head.'

'Umar said: Someone said to Wahb: 'What did the angels use to eat?' He said: 'God does what He wishes.' [742]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions:

When God said to Adam: «'I'd well, you and your wife, in the Garden, and eat thereof easefully where you desire, but draw not near this tree, lest you become evil-doers'», Iblīs desired to enter the Garden with them, but the guardians prevented him. So he came to the serpent, who was a beast with four legs, as if it were a camel, and was like the handsomest of beasts, and talked to it so that it would let him enter its mouth and would go in with him to Adam. So it let him enter its *fuqm*—Abū Ja'far 'al-Ṭabarī said: 'The *fuqm* is the side of the mouth.' The serpent passed the guardians and entered, but they did not notice, because God willed it so. 'Iblīs' spoke with 'Adam' from the side of 'the serpent's' mouth, but 'Adam' paid no attention to what he said, so he came out to him and said: «'Adam, shall I point you to the tree of eternity, and a Kingdom that decays not?'» (20: 120), meaning 'Shall I point you to a tree which, if you eat thereof, you will be a sovereign like God? Or the two of you will be immortals who never die?' And he swore by God to 'Adam and Eve': «'Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you'» (7: 21), and he meant by that to reveal to them their shameful parts, which were hidden from their sight, by tearing off their garments. He knew that they had shameful parts, since he had read it in the books of the angels, but Adam did not know this. Their garments were 'made of' horn. Adam refused to eat from it; then Eve went forward and ate from it, and said: 'Adam, eat. I have eaten and it has done me no harm.' And when Adam ate «their shameful parts became conspicuous to them, and they straightway stitched upon themselves leaves of the Garden.» (7: 22) [743]

⇒ Al-Rabī' 'b. Anas:

A narrator told me: 'Iblīs entered the Garden in the form of a beast with 'four' legs; it was as if he looked like a camel. (...) Then he

was cursed, and his legs fell off, and he became a snake. [744]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

Some camels were originally jinn. (...) All the Garden except the tree was permitted to 'Adam', and 'Adam and Eve' were told: «'I'd raw not near this tree, lest you become evil-doers'» (...) Satan came to Eve and started with her. He said: 'Have you been prohibited from anything?' She said: 'Yes, from this tree.' So he said: «'Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals.'» (7: 20) (...) So Eve began to eat of it, then she ordered Adam, and he ate from it. (...) It was a tree which moved the bowels of whoever ate it. (...) It was not seemly that there should have been excrement in the Garden. (...) 'Then Satan removed them (*azāla-humā*) from there, and brought them out of that they were in.' (...) And Adam was expelled from the Garden. [745]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq, from one of the people of knowledge:

When Adam entered the Garden, and saw the munificence therein and what God had given him of it, he said: 'If only 'I could' dwell 'here' forever!' Satan found signs of weakness here from him when he heard him say this, and approached him from the angle of 'his desire for' immortality. [736]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

I was told: 'When 'Iblīs' first started his trickery with 'Adam and Eve', he wept before them so that they grieved when they heard it. They said: 'What makes you cry?' He said: 'I am crying because of you. You will die, and will be separated from the blessings and munificence you enjoy.' This had an effect on their souls. Then he came to them and tempted (*waswasa*) them, saying: «'Adam, shall I point you to the tree of eternity, and a Kingdom that decays not?'» Then he said: «'Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals.' And he swore to them: 'Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you'», meaning: 'You will become angels, or will remain eternally—if you will not be angels—in the blessings of the Garden, and you will not die.' God said: «So he led them on by delusion» (7: 22). [747]

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

Ibn Zaid said: 'Satan tempted Eve with the tree and eventually

brought her its fruit¹, then he made her beautiful in Adam's sight. (...) So Adam called her out of desire. She said: "No! Not unless you come here." When he came to her, she said: "No! Not until you eat from this tree." (...) So he ate from it and their shameful parts became conspicuous to them. (...) Then Adam became a fugitive in the Garden, and his Lord called to him: "Adam, are you running away from Me?" He said: "No my Lord, but I am ashamed before You." He said: "Adam, from where were you approached?" He said: "From Eve, Lord." So God said: "I shall cause her to bleed once every month, just as you have caused this tree to bleed. I shall make her foolish, although I 'originally' created her mild tempered. I shall make her have a painful pregnancy and childbirth, although I 'originally' made her have an easy pregnancy and childbirth."

Ibn Zaid said: 'If it were not for the affliction which befell Eve, the women of this world would not menstruate, and they would be mild tempered, and have easy pregnancies and childbirths.' [748]

⇒ Yazīd b. 'Abd Allāh b. Qusaīṭ:

I heard Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyib swear by God: 'Adam did not eat of the tree as long as he was in his senses, but Eve gave him wine to drink, so that when he was drunk, she led him to it and he ate.' [749]

⇒ Ṭāwūs al-Yamānī:

Ibn 'Abbās said: 'The enemy of God, Iblīs, presented himself to the beasts of this world 'asking' which of them would carry him so that he could enter the Garden with it and converse with Adam and his wife, but all the beasts refused him, until he spoke to the serpent, and said to him: 'I will defend you from man, so you will be under my protection if you get me into the Garden.' So it put him between two of its fangs, and entered with him, and he spoke to 'Adam and Eve' from inside it. It was dressed to walk on four legs, but God stripped it and made it move along on its belly.'

Ibn 'Abbās says: 'Kill them when you come across them; nullify the enemy of God's covenant to protect them.' [750]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

The people of the Torah teach that the serpent talked with Adam, but they do not interpret 'this' as Ibn 'Abbās does. [751]

⇒ Muḥammad b. Qais:

God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of a single tree in the Garden, but to eat easefully of 'the other fruit' as they wished. Satan came and entered in the belly of the serpent, and spoke with Eve. Satan tempted Adam, and said: «Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals.» (...) Then Eve cut the tree and the tree bled. Then their clothes which they had on fell from them, «and they straightway stitched upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called to them: 'Did I not prohibit you from this tree, and say to you: "Verily Satan is for a manifest foe"?» (7: 22) Why did you eat what I have prohibited you?' 'Adam' said: 'My Lord, Eve gave me 'it' to eat.' 'God' said to Eve: 'Why did you give him 'it' to eat?' She said: 'The serpent ordered me.' He said to the serpent: 'Why did you order her?' It said: 'Iblīs ordered me.' He said: 'He is' cursed and driven away! As for you, Eve, just as you caused the tree to bleed, you shall bleed at every new moon! As for you, serpent, I shall cut off your legs and you shall move along sliding on your face; whoever comes across you will smash your head in with a stone! Get you down, «each of you an enemy of each.»' [752]

These Traditions have been narrated, from those of the Companions, Followers, and others we have narrated them from, concerning the description of how Iblīs, the enemy of God, caused Adam and his wife to slip so that he brought them out of the Garden. The soundest of these is, in our view, that which agrees with the Book of God. Now God stated that Iblīs tempted Adam in order to show the two of them their shameful parts which were masked from them, and that he said to them: «Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels, or lest you become immortals» (7: 20), and that «he swore to them: 'Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you'», causing them to fall through a deception. In God's statement about His enemy's swearing to Adam and his wife, by saying to them: «Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you», there is a clear demonstration that he addressed them himself, either visibly before their eyes, or concealed in something else. That is to say, it is not intelligible in the speech of the Arabs to say that so-and-so swore to so-and-so concerning this or that, if he employed some means with which he reached him without swearing to him, and an oath is not the use of such a means. Similarly with His words «Then Satan tempted him»: if he had 'tempted' Adam

in the same way as he 'tempts Adam's' offspring, by making it seem attractive that Adam should eat the 'fruit' of the tree which God had forbidden him to eat, without directly addressing to him the words and devices by which he caused him to slip, then God would not have said: «and he swore to them: 'Truly, I am a sincere adviser to you.'»

Just as someone who disobeyed 'God' would not now be permitted to say: 'Iblīs swore to me that he was a sincere adviser to me concerning my disobedience which he made seem attractive to me', so it would have been with Adam and his wife if their 'temptation' had been similar to that which now takes place between Iblīs and Adam's offspring—'God' could not have said: «and he swore to them: 'Truly I am a sincere adviser to you.'» Rather, this happened, God willing, in the way in which Ibn 'Abbās, and those who were of the same opinion as he, said.

As for the means by which he reached the Garden to speak to Adam, after God had expelled him from it and banished him from it, there is nothing in what has been narrated from Ibn 'Abbās and Wahb b. Munabbih about this which an intelligent person could object to, for it is an opinion for which no intellectual reason or necessarily correct Tradition proving the opposite refutes; it is something possible. What should be said is that he managed to address Adam as God has informed us. Perhaps he managed to do this in the way the interpreters have said, and it is even more likely, God willing, that it happened like that, because the opinions of the interpreters follow one another in confirming it, although Ibn Ishāq said:

⇒ Ibn Ishāq, concerning this,—and God is more knowing—'said what' Ibn 'Abbās and the people of the Torah said:

'Iblīs' finally got to Adam and his wife through the power God had given him to test Adam and his offspring. And he comes to mankind in their sleep and in their waking, and in every state they are in, so that he can get what he wants, so that he can call them to disobedience and bring about greed in their souls without their seeing him. God has said: «Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom, and brought them out of that they were in»; and he has said: «Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts. Surely he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you see them not. We have made the Satans the friends of those who do not believe.» (7: 27) And God said to His

prophet: «Say: 'I seek refuge with the Lord of men, the King of men, . . . '» to the end of the sura (114: 1-6).

Then 'Ibn Ishāq' quoted Traditions which narrated that the prophet had said: 'Satan is to man like his blood.'

Then Ibn Ishāq said: Man's situation between himself and the enemy of God is like 'Satan's' situation between himself and Adam. God said: «Get you down from it; it is not for you to wax proud here, so go forth; surely you are among the humbled.» (7: 13) Then 'Iblīs' got to Adam and his wife so that he could speak to them, as God has related to us about them, and He said: «Then Satan whispered to him saying: 'Adam, shall I point you to the Tree of Eternity, and a Kingdom that decays not?» (20: 120) He got to them, by 'the same means' he got to 'Adam's' offspring, without them seeing him—God knows best whether this was so—and then they turned to God in repentance. [753]

If Ibn Ishāq had been certain in his own mind that Iblīs had not got to Adam and his wife with the address which God states that he addressed to them, there would have been nothing in this 'to justify' an intelligent person's contradicting the opinion which has been widely reported from the learned, with the Book's indicating that what was widely accepted among them was correct. All the less so since he doubted! We beseech God for success.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-AKHRAJA-HUMĀ MIM-MĀ KĀNĀ FĪ-HI

As for the interpretation of «and 'he' brought them out», He means: Satan brought Adam and his wife out «of that they were in», i.e., from the comfortable life in the Garden which Adam and his wife were 'enjoying', 'and from' its abundant ease in which they 'found themselves'. It is clear that God ascribed their expulsion to Satan, although it was God who brought them out, because their leaving it was due to a cause 'which came' from Satan, and He attributes this to him because he mediated it. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-QULNA 'HBIṬŪ BA'ḌU-KUM LI-BA'ḌIN 'ADŪWUN

One says someone descended (*habaṭa*) to such-and-such a region, or to such-and-such a valley, when he settled down in that 'place'. †

These words from God make it clear that what we said about God being the one who expelled Adam from the Garden is correct, and that God's attributing to Iblīs their expulsion is as we have described. It also shows that the fall of Adam, his wife, and their enemy, Iblīs, all happened at one time, because God combines them in His statement about their fall, after the sin of Adam and his wife, and Satan's causing them 'to commit' this, according to what our Lord has said about them.

The interpreters differed about the meaning of «'Get you down'», although they all agreed that Adam and his wife are being referred to. 'All the Traditions concern the whole phrase «'Get you down, each of you an enemy of each.'»¹

⇒ Abū Šālih:

'This refers to' Adam, Eve, Iblīs, and the serpent. [754]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

He cursed the serpent and cut off its legs, and left it to move around on its belly. He made its nourishment to be of dust. Adam, Eve, Iblīs, and the serpent were caused to fall down to earth. [755]

(..)

⇒ Mujāhid:

'It means' Adam, Iblīs, and the serpent; each one's offspring was the enemy of the other. [757]

⇒ Mujāhid:

'It means' Adam and his offspring, and Iblīs and his offspring. [758]

⇒ Ismā'īl Al-Suddī, from someone who heard Ibn 'Abbās say about 'this passage':

Each of them an enemy of the other: Adam, Eve, Iblīs, and the serpent. [761, see also 760]

(..)

QUESTION: What was the enmity between Adam, his wife, Iblīs, and the serpent?

REPLY: As for the enmity of Iblīs towards Adam and his offspring, it was his envy of him and his being too arrogant to obey God and

prostrate before him when he said to his Lord: «'I am better than he; You created me from fire, but him You created from clay.'» (38: 76)

As for the enmity of Adam towards his offspring and Iblīs, it is the believer's enmity towards him for his disbelief in God, and his disobedience towards his Lord in his haughtiness towards Him and his opposition to His command. This 'enmity' on the part of Adam and the believers among his offspring is belief (*īmān*) in God, whereas Iblīs's enmity towards Adam is unbelief (*kufr*) in God.

As for the enmity between Adam and his offspring and the serpent, we have quoted what has been narrated from Ibn 'Abbās and Wahb b. Munabbih concerning this. That is the enmity between us and it, as was narrated from the Messenger of God, when he said:

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'We have not made peace with them ever since we 'first' fought them; whoever leaves any one of them out of fear is not one of us.' [763]

I consider that the origin of the conflict between us is what our scholars whose narrations we have previously quoted have said concerning 'the serpent' bringing Iblīs into the Garden after God had expelled him from there, so that he caused 'Adam' to slip from obedience to his Lord by eating what he had been forbidden to eat of the tree.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Messenger of God was asked about killing snakes. The Messenger of God said: 'The snake' and man were created each the enemy of the other. If he sees one, it frightens him, and if it bites him, it causes him distress; so kill it wherever you find it.' [764]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA-KUM FI 'L-ARḌI MUSTAQARRUN

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Abū 'l-Āliya:

It is the same as His words: «Who assigned to you the earth for a place of repose.» (2: 22) [765]

⇒ Al-Rabī':

It is the same as His words: «It is God Who¹ made for you the earth a fixed place» (40: 64). [766]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that the meaning of this was 'and for you, on earth, is a fixed place in the graves.'

(..)

⇒ Ismā'īl al-Suddī, from someone who heard Ibn 'Abbās say about 'this passage':

'It means: in¹ the grave. [768]

(..)

TABARĪ'S OPINION: In the speech of the Arabs *mustaqarr* is the place of abode. Since this is the case, whenever a being settles down somewhere on the earth, that place on earth is his *mustaqarr*. So God meant by this that they had 'been given' a place of abode and dwelling on earth in exchange for their place of abode in the Garden and Heaven. It is the same with His saying «and enjoyment (*matā'*)», by which He meant that they had enjoyment here in exchange for what they had enjoyed in the Garden.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MATĀ'UN ILĀ HĪNIN

[T] FIRST OPINION

⇒ Al-Suddī:

He means 'being brought through to death'. [770]

⇒ Ismā'īl al-Suddī, from someone who heard Ibn 'Abbās say about 'this passage':

'This means' 'life'. [771, the completion of 761 and 767]

SECOND OPINION: Others said He means . . . 'till the Rising of the Hour'.

⇒ Mujāhid:

'It means:' Till the Day of the Resurrection, till the end of this world. [772]

THIRD OPINION: Others said that «for a time» means 'till an appointed time' [⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 773].

TABARĪ'S OPINION: In the speech of the Arabs *matā'* means anything which is enjoyed: sustenance, material prosperity, ornament, sensual pleasure, or anything else. Since this is so, and since God has made the life of every living thing an enjoyment for it for the duration of its life, since He has made the earth a thing to be enjoyed by man for the duration of his life, in his dwelling there, in his being nourished by the food and fruit which God has brought forth from it, in his taking pleasure in delights which God has created there, since He has made it, after his death, a receptacle for his corpse, a home and resting place for his body, and since the name *matā'* comprises all these 'meanings', then the preferable interpretation of this verse is that it . . . has a general meaning 'of enjoyment' as long as the children of Adam and the children of Iblīs enjoy it, which is up to 'the time when' the earth will be changed into something else. 'The general meaning is the correct one' since God does not provide an indication, either in the intellect or in a report, pointing to His intending only some «enjoyment for a time», making it particular and not general.

¶ 'On earth, you will have homes and dwellings in which to set up your abode—which was in the heavens and in the Gardens—and you will find enjoyment in that, and in what I have brought forth from it for you, and in the sustenance, the material prosperity, the ornament, and the sensual pleasures which I have placed there for you, and in what I have given you, on the surface of 'the earth' for the duration of your lives, and after your death in the graves and tombs in which you will be buried; and you will continue in your enjoyment of it until I give you something else in exchange for it.'

¹ The *ṭalh* and the *sidr*, two of the most thorny shrubs.

2: 37-8

فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ
التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ * قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا
يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

*fa-talaqqā Adamu min rabbi-hi kalimātin fa-tāba 'alay-hi inna-hu
huwa 'l-tauwābu 'l-raḥīmu * qulna 'hbiṭū min-hā jamī'an fa-im-mā
ya'tiyanna-kum min-nī hudan fa-man tabi'a hudā-ya fa-lā khaufun
'alay-him wa-lā hum yahzanūna*

Then Adam received 'certain' words from His Lord, and He turned towards him; truly He turns and is All-compassionate. * We said: 'Get down out of it, all together; yet if guidance comes to you from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they sorrow.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-TALAQQĀ ĀDAMU MIN RABBI-HI KALAMĀTIN

It is said that the interpretation of «*fa-talaqqā Ādam*» is that he took and accepted. It is 'the Vth form of *laqiya* (=to meet)', as when someone receives another, meeting him when he arrives from an absence or a journey, and thus it is in His words «*fa-talaqqā*», as if he received something, and accepted it, when it was revealed to him or he was informed of it.

¶ God presented Adam with words of repentance, and Adam received them from his Lord and took them from Him penitently. Then God turned to him because of his saying these words, and his acceptance of them from his Lord.

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

'God' presented the two of them with this verse: «'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us, and have

mercy on us, we shall surely be among the lost.' » (7: 23) [774. See also ⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, part of 778; ⇒ Al-Rabī b. Anas, part of 779]

§ Ṭabarī rejects an alternative reading which has 'words' as the subject and 'Adam' as the object. He says that this inversion may be permissible from a linguistic point of view, for the verb *talaqqā* is symmetric, but all the reciters and interpreters agree that Adam is the agent.

[T]: « WORDS »: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Then Adam received 'certain' words from his Lord, and He turned towards him». 'Adam' said: 'O Lord, did You not create me with Your own hand?' 'God' said: 'Yes.' He said: 'O Lord, did You not breathe of Your spirit into me?' He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'O Lord, did You not give me an abode in Your Garden?' He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'O Lord, does Your mercy not precede Your wrath?' He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'What is Your judgement if I repent and reform, shall You return me to the Garden?' He said: 'Yes.' (...) This is 'the meaning of' His words «Then Adam received 'certain' words from his Lord». [775, 776. See also ⇒ Al-Suddī, 780, with the addition at the end: God said: «Thereafter his Lord chose him, and turned again unto him, and He guided him.» (20: 122)]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Adam said to his Lord when he had disobeyed Him: 'O Lord, what is Your judgement if I repent and reform?' And his Lord said to him: 'Surely I shall return you to the Garden.' [777. See also ⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, part of 778; ⇒ Al-Rabī b. Anas, part of 779]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Rufai', from someone who heard 'Ubaid b. 'Umar say:

Adam said: 'O Lord, is the error which I have committed something which You foreordained for me before You created me? Or is it something which I newly produced from myself?' He said: 'Yes, it is something which I foreordained for you before I created you.' He said: 'As You have foreordained it for me,

forgive me for it.' (...) This is 'the meaning of' what God said: «Then Adam received 'certain' words from his Lord». [781-5]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Abd al-Rahmān b. Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya:

He said «Then Adam received 'certain' words from his Lord»; Adam said: 'O my God, there is no god but You; glory be to You, with praise to You, I seek Your forgiveness, and turn to You in repentance. Turn towards me; truly You turn and are the All-compassionate.' [786]

⇒ Mujāhid:

'Adam' said: «'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy on us, . . . '» till he had finished it (7: 23). [787, and 789. See also ⇒ Qatāda, 791; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 792]

⇒ Ibn Abī Najīh, that Mujāhid used to say:

The words 'were': 'O my God, there is no god but You; glory be to You, with praise to You. My Lord, I have wronged myself, so forgive me; You are the best of forgivers. O my God, there is no god but You; glory be to You, with praise to You. My Lord, I have wronged myself, so have mercy on me; You are the best of the merciful. O my God, there is no god but You; glory be to You, with praise to You. Lord, I have wronged myself, so turn to me; truly You turn and are the All-merciful.' [788]

⇒ Mujāhid:

«Then Adam received 'certain' words from his Lord»; he said: 'O my Lord, would You turn to me if I repented?' He said: 'Yes.' So Adam repented, and his Lord turned towards him. [790]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: Although the opinions we have narrated from those we have narrated them from are variously phrased, their meanings agree in that God presented Adam with 'certain' words, and Adam received them from his Lord, accepted them, and acted upon them. By saying them and acting upon them, he turned towards his God in repentance for his error, acknowledging his sin, renouncing his error before his Lord, regretting what he had previously done against His command. Then God turned to him because he accepted the words which he had received from Him, and regretted his previous sin.

What the Book of God indicates is that the words which Adam received from his Lord were the words which God stated that he had spoken, thereby repenting before his Lord, acknowledging his sin, and that they were His words: «'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the lost.'» Nothing said by those who disagree with what we have said here, of the opinions we have related, is refuted, but they are opinions which are not supported by any incontrovertible proof allowing us to attribute them to Adam and 'to say' that they are what he received from his Lord when he repented to Him of his sin.

By this statement from God about Adam, about his saying 'the words' He had presented to him, and that he said them repenting to Him of his error, He lets all those addressed by His Book know how to repent to Him of their sins. He advises those He addresses with His words «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life» (2: 28), of the place of repentance for the unbelief in God that they are upon, and that their salvation from the errancy they persist in is as the salvation of their forefather Adam from his error, while He 'also' reminds them of the blessings which came before to them by which He singled out their forefather, Adam, and others among their forefathers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-TĀBA 'ALAY-HI

«He turned towards him», i.e., towards Adam . . . , which means that He bestowed repentance for his error on him. Repentance means 'turning to God', returning to obedience to Him from disobedience to Him which He abhors.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INNA-HU HUWA 'L-TAUWĀBU 'L-RAḤĪM * QULNA 'HBIṬŪ MIN-HĀ JAMĪ'AN

«'Truly He turns, and is All-compassionate» means that God truly turns to whomsoever of His sinning servants repents of his sins before Him, and that He withdraws His punishment in exchange for his returning to obedience to Him after disobeying Him through his previous sins. . . .

«All-compassionate» means that He bestows mercy on him at his repentance. His mercy towards him is the annulment of his slip and His remitting the punishment for his offence.

We have already given the interpretation of His words «Get down out of it, all together»,¹ and there is no need for us to repeat it, since the meaning here is the same as the meaning there.

⇒Abū Šālih:

«Get down out of it, all together» refers to¹ Adam, Eve, the serpent, and Iblīs. [793]

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-IM-MĀ YA'TIYANNA-KUM

The interpretation of «fa-im-mā ya'tiyanna-kum» is 'Yet if there comes to you'. The *mā* which is joined to *in*, and causes it to change phonetically to *-im-*,¹ strengthens the utterance, and because it joins with *in*, there is a doubled *nūn* (-nn-) in 'the verb' «ya'tiyanna-kum» 'which is the ending for the energetic mood'.

§ A Baṣran grammarian maintained that the *mā* here was a negative particle, and that the *-nn-* was optional, drawing an analogy with a common expression. Other language experts, however, denied the soundness of this analogy.

THE INTERPRETATION OF MIN-NĪHUDAN

FA-MAN TABI'Ā HUDĀ-YA FA-LĀ KHAUFUN 'ĀLAY-HIM
WA-LĀ HUM YAḤZANŪNA

In this place, *hudā* is 'clear discourse (*bayān*)' and 'right direction'.

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

The guidance is the prophets, the messengers, and the clear discourse. [794]

If what Abu 'l-Āliya said about this is correct, then, even though «Get down . . .» is addressed to Adam and his wife, it is Adam, his wife, and their offspring who are necessarily intended. . . .

However, we said that this is necessary on the basis of the interpretation which we quoted from Abu 'l-Āliya, because Adam was the prophet and the Messenger of God for his children during his lifetime after he was sent down to earth. It is not possible, then, he being the Messenger, that by «yet if there comes to you guidance from Me», addressed to him and his wife, is meant . . . 'prophets and Messengers', except according to the interpretation I have described.

Even if what Abu 'l-Āliya said is a possible aspect of the

interpretation of the verse, in my view the nearest interpretation to the truth, the closest to the ostensive reading, is the following:

¶ 'Yet if there comes to you, O community of those who were caused to fall down to earth from My heaven'—and that is Adam, his wife, and Iblīs, as we have mentioned before in the interpretation of the previous verse—'Yet if there comes to you from Me a clear exposition of My command and of obedience to Me, a right direction to My way and My religion, then whoever of you follows it, no fear will come to them, nor will they sorrow, even if there occurred before that on their part an act of disobedience towards Me and a contravention of My command and of obedience to Me.'

God thereby lets them know that He turns to those who repent of their sins before Him, and that He is All-merciful to whoever turns to Him, as He has Himself said with His words «truly He turns, and is All-compassionate.»

This is because 'these words' are ostensibly addressed to those to whom God said «'Get down out of it'», and these are those whom we named in the authoritative statements of the Companions and Followers whose narrations we previously quoted. And although God was addressing those who were then caused to fall from heaven to earth, it is the same custom which God has with all His creatures. He lets this be known to those whom He has mentioned at the beginning of this sura by His reference to them in His words «As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether you have warned them or have not warned them, they do not believe» (2: 6) and in His words «And some men there are who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they are not believers» (2: 8). 'And he informs them' that, if they repent before Him, return to Him, and follow the clear exposition which has come to them from God on the tongue of His Messenger, Muḥammad, they will be with Him in the Hereafter among those upon whom no fear shall come and who shall not sorrow, but that, if they perish in their unbelief and errancy before turning and repenting, they shall be among the people of the Fire, abiding therein forever.

¶ «'Then whoever follows My guidance'—whoever follows My clear exposition [⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 795] which I have given on the tongue of My Messenger, or with My Messengers—«no fear shall come upon them»—in the terrors of the Resurrection they will be safe from God's chastisement, not fearing His punishment, for they obeyed God

in this world, and followed His command, guidance, and way—; «neither shall they sorrow»—on that day for what they have left behind in this world after their deaths.

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

There is no fear for you ahead of you. [796]

There is no greater 'fear' in the breast of him who dies than what comes after death. 'God' reassured them of this, and consoled them about this world when He said «neither shall they sorrow.»

¹ See Exeg. 2: 36.

2: 39

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ
هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

*wa-'lladhīna kafarū wa-kadhdhabū bi-āyātī-nā ulā'ika aṣḥābu 'l-nāri
hum fī-hā khālīdūna*

As for the unbelievers who cry lies to Our signs, those shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, dwelling therein for ever.

¶ THOSE who deny My signs and give My Messengers the lie—the signs of God are His proofs and indicants of His oneness and lordship, and the indications and evidence which the Messengers have brought of this and of their truthfulness in what they impart from their Lord¹—they and none other shall inhabit 'the Fire', and shall dwell there forever, till the end of time.

⇒ Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī:

As for the people of the Fire, they do not die in it, nor do they live; they are a people whom the Fire strikes on account of the 'ir' errors and sins. It causes them to die a death until, when they become charcoal, they are allowed intercession 'by the Messenger'. [797]

¹ The unbelievers, those who deny: for the basic meaning of *kufir* (=covering), Ṭabarī refers back to Exeg. 2: 6, p. 107.

2: 40

يٰۤاَيُّهَا اِسْرَآءِيْلَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيْ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَاَوْفُوْا بِعَهْدِيْ اَوْفٍ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَاِيَّايَ فَاَرْهَبُوْنَ

*yā-banī Isrā'īla 'dhkurū ni'mati-ya 'llatī an'amtu 'alay-kum wa-aufū
bi-'ahd-ī ūfi bi-'ahdi-kum wa-iyā-ya fa-'rhabūni*

Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and fulfil My covenant and I shall fulfil your covenant; and hold me in awe.

THE INTERPRETATION OF YĀ-BANĪ ISRĀ'ĪLA

By His words «Children of Israel», He means the progeny of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the Friend (*khalīl*) of the All-merciful. Jacob was called Israel (*Isrā'īl*), meaning 'servant of God' and 'His chosen one' among His creatures. *Il* means 'God', and *isrā* means 'servant', as in *Jibrīl*, which means 'servant of God'.

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥārith:

Il means 'God' in Hebrew. [799. See also ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 798]

God 'hereby' . . . addressed the Jewish rabbis among the Children of Israel, who lived around the abode of emigration of the Messenger of God¹, Medina¹. He names them by the lineage of Jacob, just as He named the offspring of Adam by his lineage when He said: «Children of Adam, take your adornment at every place of worship» (7: 31), and the like. Although what He had sent down about them and others in the first part of this sura had preceded 'this', He specifically told them, in this verse and in those which follow in which He recalled His blessing to them, that the proofs and signs/verses He advanced, in which were the reports about their ancestors and forebears and the narratives about things of which they in particular, but none of the other communities, had knowledge, were things which no one else knew to be correct and true as they did, except those who had obtained knowledge about it from them. By the fact that Muḥammad had come to know 'these things', despite the remoteness of his community and tribe from knowledge of them, and despite the fact that Muḥammad had not

studied* the Books in which these things were reported, He let them know that Muḥammad could only have arrived at knowledge of them by a revelation from God, and by His sending this down to him, because they knew the correctness of this 'knowledge' through a means which was not available to other communities. This is why He specifically addressed them with His words «Children of Israel».

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«It means: 'People of scripture', 'addressed' to the rabbis among the Jews. [800]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *UDHKURŪ NI'MATI-YA 'LLATĪ AN'AMTU 'ALAY-KUM*

The blessing wherewith He blessed the Children of Israel was His choosing the Messengers from them, sending down His Books to them, and saving them from the tribulation and harm 'caused by' Pharaoh and his people until He made room for them in the land, and caused springs to gush forth from the rock, and gave them manna and quails to eat [⇒Mujāhid, 803]. Then He commanded their descendants to remember what had come to their forefathers from Him before, not to forget what He had done for their ancestors and forefathers, lest the retribution which befell those of them who forgot His blessings and were ungrateful for them, and denied what He had done for them, befall them.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«'Remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you', i.e., 'the benefits I 'bestowed' upon you and your forefathers', wherewith He saved them from Pharaoh and his people. [801, continuation of 800]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

«Remember My blessing», i.e., His blessing in making prophets and Messengers from them; and sending them scriptures. [802]

(.)

God's reminder to them of His blessings in this verse on the tongue of His Messenger is similar to Moses' reminder to their ancestors about

* Understanding *qillat muzāwalat Muḥammad* as a negation. See Sh. & Sh., I, 554, n. 1.

His covenant, which God reported that he had reminded them 'of' when he said: «And when Moses said to his people: 'O my people, remember God's blessing upon you, when He appointed among you prophets, and appointed you kings, and gave you such as He had not given to any being.'» (5: 20)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-AUFŪ BI-'AHD-Ī ŪFI BI-'AHDĪ-KUM*

We have previously explained the meaning of 'ahd in this book of ours, as well as the disagreements among those who differed about its interpretation and what we considered to be the correct opinion.¹ It is, in this place, the covenant and ordinance (*waṣīya*) of God, which He imposed upon the Children of Israel in the Torah, to announce to the people that Muḥammad is His Messenger, that they would find written down with them in the Torah that he is the prophet of God, and that they should believe in him and in what he brought from God.

¶ «'And I shall fulfil your covenant»—His covenant with them that if they acted 'in accordance with the above covenant' He would cause them to enter the Garden² [⇒Ibn Juraij, 808, with reference to 5: 12].

(...)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«'And fulfil My covenant» which I imposed 'on your necks' for Muḥammad when he came, «and I shall fulfil your covenant», i.e., fulfil for you what I promised you for attesting his truth and obeying him, by relieving 'you' of the loads and fetters which were upon your necks³ for your sins which you had committed. [805, continuation of 800, 801]

(..)

⇒Ibn Zaid:

'This means: Fulfil My command and I shall fulfil what I promised you. (...) «God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of the Garden; they fight in the way of God; they kill, and are killed; that is a promise binding upon God in the Torah, and the Evangel, and the Qur'ān; and who fulfils his covenant truer than God?» (9: 111) This is His covenant to which He committed them. [810]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ĪYĀ-YA FA-'RHABŪNI

¶ Fear Me and beware, O Children of Israel who neglect My covenant and give the lie to My Messenger concerning whom I made compact with you in the Books which I sent down to My prophets that you should believe in him and obey him, lest My punishment, which I brought down on those of your ancestors who opposed My command and gave the lie to My prophets, be made to befall you if you do not turn to Me and repent by following him and averring what I sent down to him.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«I And hold Me in awe», lest I send down to you the retribution, which you know about—the transformation⁴ and other signs of wrath¹—which I sent down to your forefathers who were before you. [811, continuation of 800, 801, 805]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

He means 'fear Me!' [812; see also ⇒ al-Suddī, 813]

¹ See Exeg. 2: 27, pp. 186–9.

² See 5: 12 and 7: 156–7.

³ See 7: 157.

⁴ See 2: 65 and 5: 60.

2: 41

وَعَامِنُوا بِمَا أَنزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُونُوا أَوَّلَ
كَافِرٍ بِهِ وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا وَإِيَّيَ فَاتَّقُونَ

*wa-āminū bi-mā anzaltu muṣaddiqan li-mā ma'a-kum wa-lā takūnū
awwala kāfirin bi-hī wa-lā tashtarū bi-āyāt-i thamanan qalīlan
wa-īyā-ya fa-'ttaqūni*

And believe in that which I have sent down in confirmation of what is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it. And sell not My signs for a little price; and fear Me.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ĀMINŪ BI-MĀ ANZALTU
MUṢADDIQAN LI-MĀ MA'A-KUM

¶ «BELIEVE in»—attest the truth of¹—«that which I have sent down»—the Qur'ān which He sent down to Muḥammad—«in confirmation of what is with you»—for¹ the Qur'ān confirms the Torah which the Jews of the Children of Israel have with them; He commands them to attest the truth of the Qur'ān, and He tells them that if they attest the truth of the Qur'ān they attest the truth of the Torah, because the command to aver the prophethood of Muḥammad, to attest his truthfulness and to obey him, which is in the Qur'ān, is paralleled by the similar command¹ in the Torah and the Evangel, 'because' if they attest the truth of what was sent down to Muḥammad, they attest the truth of the Torah which is with them; but if they give the lie to it, they give the lie to the Torah which is with them.

«I'n confirmation (*muṣaddiqan*)» is a phrase describing the state of the omitted pronoun (-hu) referring back to 'in' that 'which' ('bi-mā'). The meaning of the passage is: 'Believe in that which I sent down in confirmation of what is with you, O Jews.' And what is with them is the Torah and the Evangel.

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

«And believe in that which I sent down in confirmation of what is with you». He means: 'O community of the people of scripture, believe in that which I sent down to Muḥammad in confirmation

of what is with you.' He means: because they find Muḥammad written down in the Torah and the Evangel. [816. See also ⇒Mujāhid, 814-5]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LĀ TAKŪNŪ*
A WWALA KĀFIRIN BI-HĪ

§ The verb «be not» is in the plural, while, in the complement, the word «*kāfir* (=disbeliever)» is in the singular. Ṭabarī says that such a construction is permissible when the word in the singular is derived from a verb, because it then replaces a clause consisting of the pronoun *man* (= 'he/they' who) and the verb. *Man* governs a singular form of the verb, although it may represent one, two, or more individuals, and behaves, in this respect, like a collective noun. The meaning of this verse is thus equivalent to: 'and be not (pl.) the first of those who (*man*) disbelieve (*yakfuru* sing.).'

¶ O community of the rabbis of the people of scripture, attest the truth of the Qur'ān I have sent down to My Messenger, Muḥammad, which confirms your scripture and the Torah and the Evangel which is with you, in which it was covenanted to you that he is My Messenger, My prophet, delegated with the truth; and be not the first of your people to give it the lie and to deny that it is from Me, since with you is the knowledge of it which no others have.

[T]: «IT»: FIRST OPINION: Their disbelief in it is their denying that it is from God, and the pronoun «it» refers back to «that which» in His words «And believe in that which I sent down».

⇒Ibn Juraij:

«'A'nd be not the first to disbelieve in it»: in the Qur'ān. [817]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

«'A'nd be not the first to disbelieve in him»: He means 'Be not the first of those who disbelieved in Muḥammad.' [818]

THIRD OPINION: And one of 'the interpreters' said «'A'nd be not the first to disbelieve in it», i.e., in your scripture, and his interpretation was that when they gave the lie to Muḥammad, they gave the lie to their scripture, because it contained the command to obey Muḥammad.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: These two latter opinions are remote from the ostensive meaning which the recitation indicates; that is to say, at the beginning of this verse God commands those addressed by it to believe in what he sent down to Muḥammad, and says: «And believe in that which I sent down in confirmation of what is with you». It is clear that what God sent down in the time of Muḥammad was the Qur'ān, and not Muḥammad, because Muḥammad was a Messenger sent, not a Message sent down: the thing sent down was the Book. Then He forbids them to be the first of those who disbelieve in that in which He commanded them to believe in the beginning of the verse. There is no ostensive mention of Muḥammad in this verse, such that there could be an indirect reference back to him in His words 'and be not the first to disbelieve in him', although it is not impossible in a passage for a name which has not received an ostensive mention in the passage to be referred to indirectly.²

Similarly, there is no sense in the opinion of him who claimed that the pronoun «it» refers to «what» in «what is with you», i.e., the previous scriptures, because, although this is a possible ostensive meaning of the passage 'taken out of context', it is remote from what the ostensive meaning of the recitation and revelation indicates, because of what we have already said, viz. that the thing in which it is commanded to believe is the Qur'ān. It therefore necessarily follows that the thing in which it is forbidden to disbelieve is the very same Qur'ān. That that in which it is commanded to believe and that in which it is forbidden to disbelieve, in a single passage and a single verse, are two different things is not the most normal or obvious meaning of the passage. Moreover, this is a far-fetched interpretation.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«And believe in that which I have sent down in confirmation of what is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it», when you possess knowledge of it which others do not possess. [819, continuation of 811, etc.]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LĀ TASHTARŪ BI-ĀYĀT-Ī*
THAMANAN QALĪLAN

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

«And sell not My signs for a little price». He means: 'Do not take

remuneration for it.' . . . This was written in their first scripture:
'O children of Adam, teach freely just as you were taught freely.'
[820, continuation of 818]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«And sell not My signs for a little price». He means: 'Do not take a trifle you covet and hide the name of God.' This 'price' is what they covet. [821]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The interpretation of the verse is thus: 'Do not sell the knowledge I have given you through My Book and its verses for a paltry sum and an offer of a little of the goods of this world.' Their selling of it is their failing to inform the people of what there is about Muḥammad in their Book, and that it is written in it that he is the unlettered prophet whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Evangel; and the «little price» is the pleasure they take in leading the people of their community and religion who follow them, and the recompense they take from whomsoever they explain these things to, for whatever they explain to him.

§ The verb *ishtarā* properly means 'to buy', but Ṭabarī explains that whoever 'buys' a small price for the signs of God, 'sells' the signs for the price, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between 'buying' and 'selling' which permits *tashtarū* to be interpreted as 'sell'.

The meaning of this is as Abu 'l-Āliya interpreted it: 'Explain about Muḥammad to the people, but do not seek any remuneration from them for it.' Here His prohibition on taking a recompense for explaining this is a prohibition on selling His signs for a little price.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ĪYĀ-YA FA-'TTAQŪNI

¶ Fear Me when you sell My signs for a paltry sum, and purchase a little of the goods 'of this world' for them, and when you disbelieve in what I have sent down to My Messenger, and deny the prophethood of My prophet, lest I send down upon you the exemplary punishment and retribution which I sent down on your ancestors who travelled along your path.

¹ See Exeg. 2: 3, p. 95.

² Ibn Kathīr (I, 150) thought that, since the two opinions, viz. that the pronoun referred to the

Qur'ān, and that it referred to Muḥammad, both entailed each other, and that to deny one was to deny the other, both of them were true. The editor of the Arabic text of Ṭabarī points out that, although this may be true when the text is analysed and reflected upon, and may therefore be intellectually and religiously valid, Ṭabarī wished to restrict what the words and pronouns in the verse referred to, their ostensive and direct referents, in order to distinguish clearly between the various meanings. (Sh. & Sh., I, 564, n. 2.)

2: 42

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

wa-lā talbisu 'l-ḥaqqā bi-'l-bāṭili wa-taktumu 'l-ḥaqqā wa-antum ta'lamūna

And do not confound the truth with falsehood, and do not conceal the truth wittingly.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ TALBISU 'L-ḤAQQA BI-'L-BĀṬILI

By His words «*wa-lā talbisū*» He means 'do not mix' . . .

§ Ibn 'Abbās interprets the same verb *labasa* in 6: 9 as having the same meaning.

(...)[†]

QUESTION: How can they confound the truth with falsehood when they are unbelievers? What truth can be with them when they disbelieve in God?

REPLY: Among them there were their hypocrites who declared that they believed in the truth of Muḥammad while secretly they disbelieved in him. Most of them used to say: 'Muḥammad is a delegated prophet, but he was delegated to others, not to us.' So the confounding of truth and falsity by the hypocrites among them was their declaring the truth with their tongues, and publicly averring the truth of Muḥammad and what he had brought, while mixing this declaration of the truth with what they secretly 'believed'. Their averring that he had been sent to others while denying he had been sent to them, was a confounding of . . . the truth with falsehood, for God sent him to all creatures without exception. . . .

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«This means: Do not mix saying what is true with saying what is false. [823]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

«And do not confound the truth with falsehood». He means: Do not mix the truth up with falsehood; give sincere advice to the servants of God about Muḥammad. [824]

OTHER OPINIONS

⇒ Mujāhid:

«And do not confound the truth with falsehood», i.e. Judaism and Christianity with Islam. [825]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

The truth is the Torah which God sent down to Moses, and the falsehood is what they wrote with their own hands. [826]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-TAKTUMU 'L-ḤAQQA* *WA-ANTUM TA'LAMŪNA*

§ This verse is in two parts: the first part contains the verb «*wa-lā talbisū*», which is a negative imperative expressed by *lā* with the apocope, and everyone is agreed on its recitation and grammatical form; the second part contains the verb «*taktumū*» but without *lā*, and there is disagreement about the syntax and hence the meaning of this verb. According to one interpretation, this second verb is also in the apocope and is thus also a negative imperative governed by the same *lā* as is the first. According to a second interpretation, «*taktumū*» is in the subjunctive, because it expresses a statement—'and you conceal the truth . . .'; Ṭabarī shows through an example that when the first verb in a double clause is a negative imperative, and the second a statement, the second verb goes into the subjunctive, since it is connected semantically but not syntactically to the first verb in the apocope.

However, the first of the two interpretations which we have said the verse can sustain expresses the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās—

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

He said «*wa-taktumu 'l-ḥaqq*», meaning 'Do not conceal the truth when you know it'. [827; see also 828]

—while the second aspect expresses the opinion of Abu 'l-Āliya—

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

They kept the delegation of Muḥammad concealed. [829. See also ⇒ Mujāhid, 830, 831]

As for the interpretation of the truth which they concealed wittingly:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«And do not conceal the truth». He means: Do not conceal the knowledge of My Messenger and what he brought which is with you, although you find him in what you know from the books you have in your own hands. [832]

(..)

⇒ Mujāhid:

You conceal 'the truth about' Muḥammad wittingly, although you find him 'written down' with you in the Torah and the Evangel. [838; see also 834-5; and ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 837]

¶ 'Do not confuse the people, O rabbis among the people of scripture, concerning Muḥammad and what he brought from his Lord; for you claim that he was delegated to some kinds of communities but not to others, or you are hypocritical about him, while you know that he was delegated to all of you and to all communities besides you. In this way you mix the truth with falsehood, and you thereby conceal the description of him that you find in your scripture, that he is My Messenger to all mankind. 'You do this' knowing that he is My Messenger, and that what he brought is from Me, and that part of My covenant that I imposed upon you in your scripture was faith in him, in what he brought, and the attestation of his truthfulness.'

2: 43

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

wa-aqīmu 'l-ṣalāta wa-ātu 'l-zakāta wa-'rka'ū ma'a 'l-rāki'īna

And perform the prayer, and pay *zakāt*, and bow with those who bow.

It has been mentioned that the Jewish rabbis and hypocrites ordered the people to perform the prayer and to give *zakāt*, while they did not do these things [themselves]. So God commanded them to perform the prayer¹ with the Muslims who attested the truthfulness of Muḥammad and what he brought, to pay *zakāt* on their wealth along with them, and to submit to His Messenger as they submitted.

(..)

The payment of *zakāt* is the contribution of the prescribed alms.² The basic meaning of *zakāt* is the growth of assets, their fructifying and increasing. Thus it is said: '*Zaka 'l-zar*' (=the seed)', when what God brought forth from it multiplied; '*Zakati 'l-naḥa*' (=the cost)', when it went up; one says of a single number *zakā* when it doubles and becomes even.†

Zakāt, which is assets which come from assets, is so called, because, by extracting it from what it is extracted from, God fructifies the assets remaining to their owner. It is also possible that it is called *zakāt* because it purifies (*ṭaḥīr*) the assets remaining to the man, and clears them from containing anything wrongly acquired by those who share in them. 'This latter meaning' is similar to 'the meaning of' what 'God' said when He gave information about His prophet, Moses: «'What, have you killed an innocent (*zakīy*) soul . . . ?'», i.e., 'one free of sin, pure'. . . . I find this aspect more attractive than the first, as regards the interpretation of the *zakāt* on wealth, although the first is acceptable as its interpretation.

As for the interpretation of bowing (*rukū'*), it is submission to God with 'due' obedience. . . .†

This is a command from God, to the rabbis among the Children of Israel and their hypocrites who have been mentioned, to turn to Him and repent, to perform the prayer, to pay *zakāt*, to enter into Islam

with the Muslims, to submit to Him in obedience. And He thereby prohibits them from keeping concealed what they know about the prophethood of Muḥammad, after his proofs were manifested to them—as we have previously described in our book—and after admonishing and warning them and recalling to them His blessings on them and on their ancestors, thereby acting compassionately towards them, and going far in granting forgiveness.

¹ For a description of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), see *Exeg.* 2: 3, p. 99 and n. 4.

² For *zakāt* see also *Exeg.* 2: 3, pp. 99–100 and n. 5.

2: 44

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ
الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

*ata'murūna 'l-nāsa bi-'l-birri wa-tansauna anfusa-kum wa-antum
tatlūna 'l-kitāba a-fa-lā ta'qilūna*

Will you bid the people to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite the scripture? Do you not understand?

THE INTERPRETATION OF ATA'MURŪNA 'L-NĀSA BI-'L-BIRRI WA-TANSAUNA ANFUSA-KUM

[T]: « *BIRR* »: There is a consensus among all 'the interpreters' that all obedience to God is called *birr*, but there is disagreement as to its precise meaning¹.

FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

« Will you bid the people to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite the scripture? Do you not understand? » That is to say: 'You forbid the people to disbelieve in the prophecy and the covenant from the Torah which is with you, while you desist yourselves, i.e., while you disbelieve in My covenant 'imposed' on you about attesting the truthfulness of My Messenger which is in it, while you violate My pact, and deny what you know from My Book.' [840]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Will you bid the people to piety?» He means: 'Will you bid the people to enter into the religion of Muḥammad, and into other things like the prayer which you were commanded to perform, and forget yourselves?' [841]

SECOND OPINION

(..)

⇒ Qatāda:

The Children of Israel used to bid the people to obey God, to fear Him, and to piety, while they did the opposite; so God upbraided them. [843]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

The people of scripture and the hypocrites used to bid the people to fast and pray, but they did not do what they bid the people to do, so God upbraided them. Whoever bids to good should be the most prompt person to do it. [844]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

These are the Jews. When men came to ask them about that in which there was no legal claim, no bribe, nothing 'like that', they bid them to the truth. So God said 'this verse' . . . to them. [845]

(..)

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The meanings of all the opinions of those whose opinions we have quoted about the interpretation of this verse are approximately the same, because, although they differ in the way they describe the *birr* to which the group whom God described . . . bid others, they approximate each other in 'what they say' about 'the group's' bidding people to say and do what is pleasing to God, and acting contrary to what they bid them to do.

The interpretation whose correctness the ostensive meaning of the recitation points to is: 'Will you bid the people to obey God and leave yourselves to disobey Him? Why do you not bid 'yourselves' to the obedience to your Lord to which you bid the people?' He rebukes them by this, and denounces the ignominy of what they perpetrate.

The meaning of «and forget yourselves» is similar to the forgetting in «they have forgotten God, and He has forgotten them» (9: 67), meaning they have abandoned obedience to God, and He has left them out of His reward.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-ANTUM TATLŪNA 'L-KITĀBA*

By «*tatlūna*» He means 'study' and 'recite'.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'While you recite the Book». He means by this: 'While you study the scripture.' And by 'the scripture' He means the Torah. [847]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *A-FA-LĀ TA'QILŪNA*

¶ Do you not understand the evil of the disobedience to your Lord which you perpetrate, bidding people to do the opposite, forbidding them to act disobediently while doing so yourselves; and yet you know that the right's of God and the obedience to Him which are 'imposed' upon you, as well as the 'obligation' to follow Muḥammad and have faith in him and in what he brought, are the same as what is 'imposed' on those you bid to obedience to Him.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Do you not understand?» He means: 'Do you not comprehend?' He forbids them to behave in this evil way. [848]

2: 45

وَأَسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى
الْخَاشِعِينَ

*wa-'sta'inū bi-'l-ṣabri wa-'l-ṣalāti wa-inna-hā la-kabīratun illā 'ala
'l-khāshi'īna*

Seek help in patience and prayer; but it is an arduous matter, save
for the humble,

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-'STA'INŪ BI-'L-ṢABRI*
WA-'L-ṢALĀTI

¶ IN fulfilling My covenant which you covenanted with Me in your scripture: to obey Me and follow My command; to give up the leadership and love of this world, of which you are 'so' fond, for the submission to My command and compliance with My Messenger, Muḥammad, which you dislike, seek help in being patient towards it and in prayer.

It has been said that the meaning of *ṣabr* (=patience) in this place is *ṣaum* (=abstention, also =fasting), which is one of the meanings of *ṣabr*. According to us, the interpretation given by those who interpret thus is: God commands them to be patient with regard to all the 'forms of' obedience to God which they themselves dislike, and to abandon disobedience to Him.

The basic meaning of *ṣabr* is 'to restrain the soul from what it loves', 'to curb it from its desires', and that is why someone who is patient in affliction is called *ṣābir*, because he curbs his soul from anguish. It is also why the month of Ramaḍān is called the month of *ṣabr*, because it restrains (*ṣabr*) the faster from eating and drinking during the day-time. Its restraining them from this means its holding them back and curbing them from it. Similarly one restrains¹ a man who has committed an evil 'whose penalty' is execution', meaning that¹ one imprisons him for it until one has executed him: one says 'So-and-so executed so-and-so in custody (*ṣabran*)', meaning thereby that he kept him in custody until he executed him; the person executed is called the *maṣbūr*, and the executioner the *ṣābir*.

As for *ṣalāt*, we have already mentioned its meaning.²

QUESTION: We understand what is meant by the command to seek help from patience in fulfilling the covenant and keeping up obedience 'to God', but what is the meaning of seeking help from prayer in being obedient to God and abandoning disobedience, in stepping down from leadership and giving up 'the pleasures of' this world?

REPLY: The prayer contains recitation of the Book of God, whose verses summon 'one' to reject this world and forsake its comfort. They make souls forget the adornment and vanities of 'this world', and remind 'them' of the Hereafter and of what God has prepared there for those who dwell there. In reflecting upon them, there is, for those who obey God, assistance in 'their' perseverance. . . .

⇒Hudhaifa 'b. al-Yamān':

Whenever any matter afflicted the Messenger of God, he would seek refuge in prayer. [849; see also 850]

⇒'No chain of transmission':

The Messenger of God saw Abū Huraira sprawled out on his stomach, and said to him: 'Is your stomach in pain?' He said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Stand up and pray. There is a remedy in prayer.' [851]

God commanded the rabbis from the Children of Israel whose situation He has described to make assistance from patience and prayer their refuge in fulfilling God's covenant which they covenanted with Him, just as He commanded His prophet, Muḥammad, when He said to him: «So be patient», Muḥammad, «in the face of what they say, and proclaim your Lord's praise before the rising of the sun, and before its setting, and proclaim your Lord's praise in the watches of the night, and at the ends of the day; haply you will be well-pleasing.» (20: 130) He commanded him to seek refuge in patience and prayer in his affliction.

⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān 'b. Jaushan':

Ibn 'Abbās was confronted with the news of the death of his brother, Qutham, while he was travelling, and he said: 'We are God's, and to him we return.'¹ Then he turned aside from the road, dismounted, and prayed two units of prayer (*rak'atain*), in which he extended the period of sitting. Then he stood up and walked to his mount, and said: «Seek help in patience and prayer; but it is an arduous matter, save for the humble». [852]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

«God» means: Seek help from patience and prayer in trying to please God, and know that these are part of obedience to God. [853]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

«Seek help in patience and prayer»; these are helps towards God's mercy. [854]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

The polytheists said: 'By God, Muḥammad, you summon us to something arduous!' He said: 'To prayer and faith in God, may His praise be exalted!' [855]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-INNA-HĀ LA-KABĪRATUN ILLĀ 'ALA 'L-KHĀSHI'ĪNA

«It» in «but it is an arduous matter» refers to 'prayer'. Some of the interpreters¹ said that it refers to Muḥammad's reply ¹, [855] above¹, but there is no mention of any words of reply to which «it» could be made to be an indirect reference, and it is not permissible to abandon the understandable ostensive meaning of a passage for an indirect meaning for whose correctness there is no indication.

By «*kabīra* (=arduous)» He means 'severe', 'weighty (*thaqīla*)' [⇒ Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 856(i)].

By «save for the humble» He means 'save for those who submit to obedience to Him, those who fear [⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 857] His authority, those who believe in the truth of His promise (*wa'd*) and His threat (*wa'id*)'.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Slave for the humble», i.e., those who believe in the truth of what God sent down. [856(ii)]

⇒ Mujāhid:

«This means» the true believers. [858, 859]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

Humility «is» fear and dread of God. (...) «And you shall see them ...» humble in submission»; the fear which descended upon them had made them submissive, and they were humble before it. [860]

The basic meaning of *khushū'* (= humility) is abasement, submissiveness, acquiescence.‡

¶ «O rabbis among the people of scripture, seek help by confining yourselves to obedience to God, by renouncing disobedience to God, and by performing the prayer, which prevents evil and reprehensible deeds, and brings «one» near to that wherein is God's pleasure, which is oppressive to perform except for those who abase themselves before God, acquiesce in obeying to Him, and submit out of fear of Him.»

¹ *Ṣabara* also has the meaning 'to fetter'.

² See *Exeg.* 2: 3, p. 99 and n. 4.

2: 46

الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

«a»lladhīna yazunnūna anna-hum mulāqū rabbi-him wa-anna-hum ilay-hi rāji'ūna

who reckon that they shall meet their Lord and that unto Him they shall return.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ALLADHĪNA YAZUNNŪNA

QUESTION: How can God say of someone to whom He has attributed humility of obedience towards Him that he 'supposes' that he will meet Him? For *ẓann* is doubt, and he who doubts about meeting God is, according to you, a disbeliever in God.

REPLY: The Arabs sometimes use *ẓann* to mean 'certainty',‡ and other times to mean 'doubt', just as they sometimes use *sudfa* to mean 'darkness', and other times to mean 'light', and sometimes use *ṣārikh* to mean 'one who helps', and other times to mean 'one who seeks help', and so forth with the nouns by which both the thing and its opposite are named. The evidential examples from Arabic poems and speech that *ẓann* can be used to mean 'certainty' are too numerous to count ..., but among them are the words of God: «Then the evil-doers will see the Fire, and will reckon (*ẓannū*) that they are about to fall into it» (18: 53). The exegetes' commentary gives the same 'meaning' as we have given.

⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya, concerning this verse:

Zann here means 'certainty'. [861. See also ⇒ Al-Suddī, 864]

⇒ Mujāhid:

Every *zann* in the Qur'ān means 'certainty'¹ [862, 863 (variant: 'means "knowledge"')]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

«Those¹ who reckon that they shall meet their Lord», they know 'for certain' that they shall meet their Lord. It is the same with His words: «I was certain (*zanantu*) that I should encounter my reckoning» (69: 20), meaning 'I knew'. [865. See also ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 866]

THE INTERPRETATION OF ANNA-HUM MULĀQŪ RABBI-HIM

§ The word «*rabbi-him*» is annexed in the genitive to the nomen agentis *mulāqūn* which loses its final *nūn* (-n) in the annexation (*iḍāfa*), although the meaning is that of a verbal sentence requiring an object in the accusative. While saying that there is no dispute about the correctness of this usage, even when the nomen agentis carries the sense of an incompleted action, either future or present, Ṭabarī cites a difference of opinion between Baṣran and Kūfan grammarians as to the reason for it.

¶ Seek help in fulfilling My covenant from patience towards it and prayer, for prayer is an arduous thing except for those who fear My punishment and submit to My command, who are certain of meeting Me and returning to Me after they die.

God stated that prayer is arduous except for those who have this attribute, because whoever is not certain of the life to come (*ma'ād*) and does not believe in the Return and in reward and punishment, finds prayer a hardship and a vain effort, for he does not anticipate that by performing it he will see any benefit or repel any harm. Anyone who has this attribute is apt to find the prayer arduous, and he will find its performance a burden and a load, but it will seem light to those who believe in the truth of the meeting with God, who hope for His abundant reward for it, who fear His painful punishment for neglecting it, since they hope that by performing it they will attain, in the life to come, what God has promised those 'who perform it', and are on their guard against what He has threatened for those who neglect it. God

commanded the rabbis of the Children of Israel whom He addresses by this verse to perform 'the prayer' in expectancy of its reward, if they are to be certain of returning to God and meeting Him at the Resurrection.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ANNA-HUM ILAY-HI RĀJI'ŪNA

«They (-*hum*)» refers to the humble . . . , so the interpretation of the passage is: It is arduous except for the humble who are certain that they will return to their Lord.

[T]: *RUJŪ* /RETURN: FIRST OPINION:

⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya:

They are certain that they will return to Him on the Day of the Resurrection. [867]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that it means that they will return to Him when they die.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferable of these two interpretations of the verse is the opinion voiced by Abu 'l-'Āliya, because God said in a previous verse «How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and He gave you life, then He causes you to die, then He gives you life, then unto Him are you returned?» So God stated that they will return to Him after He resurrects them and revivifies them from their death; and there is no doubt that that will be on the Day of the Resurrection. So this is how «and that unto Him they shall return» is to be interpreted.

¹ In this Tradition from Mujāhid, among all the numerous occurrences of *zanna* and its derivatives in the Qur'ān, «*inn-i zanantu*» (69: 20) and «*wa-zannū*» (7: 171, 9: 118, 10: 22, 12: 110, 28: 39, 41: 48, and 59: 2) are specifically referred to. One can observe a similar ambiguity in the use of the English verb 'to suppose', which is often used as the translation for *zanna*.

2: 47

يٰۤاَيُّهَا بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

*yā-banī Isrā'īla 'dhkurū ni'mat-iyā 'llatī an'amtū 'alay-kum wa-ann-ī
faddaltu-kum 'ala 'l-'ālamīna*

Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and that I preferred you above all beings;

THE INTERPRETATION OF *YA-BANĪ ISRĀ'ĪLA 'DHKURŪ NI'MAT-Ī
ALLATĪ AN'AMTU 'ALAY-KUM*

THIS is to be interpreted in this verse as it was previously in «remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and fulfil My covenant» (2: 40), and that 'interpretation' was given there.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-ANN-Ī FADDALTU-KUM
'ALA 'L-'ĀLAMĪNA*

This is also one of His reminders to them of His favours and blessings towards them. By «and that I preferred you above all beings» He means: 'I preferred your ancestors', and He links His blessings towards their forefathers and ancestors with the fact that they are blessings from Him to them, since the glories of the fathers are the glories of the sons, and the blessings on the fathers are the blessings on the sons, for the sons are from the fathers. He gave His words . . . a general reference¹, i.e., 'all beings'¹, but He intended a specific reference, for the meaning is: And I preferred you above the world of those among whom, and in whose era, you lived.¹

⇒ Qatāda:

He preferred them above the world of that time. [868]

⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya:

«I preferred you above all beings»¹ by the kingdom, the Messengers, and the scriptures which I gave you, above the world of those who existed at that time; for there is a world for each era. [869]

(..)

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

I asked Ibn Zaid about God's words «and that I preferred you above all beings». He said: 'The world of the people of that time.' And He recited the words of God: «and We chose them, out of a knowledge, above all beings» (44: 32). He said: 'This 'refers' to those who obeyed Him and followed His command; among them were the monkeys, who were the most hateful of His creatures to Him. He said to this nation: «You are the best nation ever brought forth to men» (3: 110). (...) This 'refers' to those who obey God and follow His command and keep away from what He has forbidden. [872]

The proof of the correctness of what we have said about the interpretation of this being specific, as we have described it, is:

⇒ Mu'āwiya b. Ḥaida¹:

I heard the Messenger of God say: 'Indeed, you are the completion of seventy nations.'

Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm¹, who narrated this Tradition to Ṭabarī,¹ said 'that the Messenger of God said': 'You are the last of them.'

Al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā¹, who also narrated the same Tradition to Ṭabarī,¹ said 'that the Messenger of God said': 'You are the best of them and the dearest to God.' [873]

This Tradition from the Prophet informs 'us that' the Children of Israel were not preferred above the nation of Muḥammad, and that the meaning of «and We preferred them above all beings» (45: 16) and «and that I preferred you above all beings» is according to the interpretation we have explained.

¹ For the interpretation of «'ālamīn», see *Exeg.* 1: 1, p. 64.

2:48

وَأَتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ
مِنْهَا شَفْعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

*wa-'ttaqū yauman lā tajzī nafsun 'an nafsīn shai'an wa-lā yuqbalu
min-hā shafā'atun wa-lā yu'khadhu min-hā 'adlun wa-lā hum
yunṣarūna*

and beware of a day when no soul shall settle anything for another, and no intercession shall be accepted for it, nor any redemption be taken for it, neither shall they be helped.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'TTAQŪ YAUMAN LĀ TAJZĪ
NAFSUN 'AN NAFSIN SHAI'AN

§ Ṭabarī says that a pronoun referring back to «day (*yaum*)» has been omitted in the second phrase in this passage, but that this is permissible because its implied meaning is obvious. However, there is a dispute about exactly where this pronoun should be inserted.

The meaning in 'this passage' . . . is of a warning from God to His servants whom He addresses by this verse that His punishment will befall them on the Day of the Resurrection, which is the Day on which no soul shall settle anything for another, «when no father shall settle anything for his son, nor any child for his father.» (31: 33) . . .

⇒ Al-Suddī:

. . . As for «*tajzī*», 'it means' 'avail (*tughnī*)'. [874]

The basic meaning of *jazā'* in the speech of the Arabs is 'settlement (*qadā'*)' and 'indemnification (*tafwīḍ*)'. One says: 'I repaid (*jazaitu*) him his loan, the amount 'I was' indebted to him'; and 'May God requite (*jazā*) so-and-so with good or bad for me', meaning: 'May He reward him on my account, and may He repay him on my behalf, what I owe him for what he has done for me in the past.'

(...)

¶ And beware of a day when no soul shall settle anything for another or avail him aught.

. . . This means that at the present time anyone of us may settle a debt on behalf of his son or his father, or someone who is his friend or his kin; however, in the Hereafter, according to what the Traditions have informed us, 'each' person will be happy for any right he has against his son or his father to be upheld, for at the Resurrection rights 'between people' will be settled with good and bad deeds.

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'May God have mercy on a servant who does wrong against his brother's honour'—Abū Kuraib^f, who was one of the two persons who reported this Tradition to Ṭabarī,¹ said in his narration: ' . . . or property, or dignity'—'and who seeks legal absolution from him before it is taken from him at a time when there is no dinar or dirham; then, if he has any good deeds to his credit, they will take away from his good deeds, but if he has no good deeds, they will transfer to him their bad deeds.' [875-7, 879]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Messenger of God said: 'Verily, let none of you die in debt, for there is no dinar or dirham there; they will only distribute good and bad deeds among themselves there.' And the Messenger of God indicated to the right and to the left with his hand. [878]

So the meaning of His words «*lā tajzī nafsun 'an nafsīn shai'an*» is that no 'soul' shall settle anything 'as' incumbent on it 'which appertains' to another. For the settlement there is through good and bad deeds as we have described, and how could someone settle for another person what is incumbent on 'that other person', when he is pleased that every right he 'justly claims' from his son or his father should be rendered 'to him', and that it will be taken from him and he will not be absolved?

§ Ṭabarī rejects as not being in accordance with the ostensive wording of the text the opinion of a Baṣran grammarian that the meaning of this phrase is that no soul will take the place of another on that day. Such an interpretation would, he says, only be permissible were the word «*shai'an*» not present.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ YUQBALU MIN-HĀ
SHAFĀ'ATUN

«*Shafā'a*» is the verbal noun from *shafa'a* as when someone says: 'So-and-so interceded (*shafa'a*) on my behalf with so-and-so', when

‘the first person’¹ entreated ‘the other’¹ concerning the settlement of his affair. An intercessor is called *shafi’* or *shāfi’* because he duplicates the one seeking the intercession and becomes through him one of a pair,¹ for before the intercession . . . the person in need was a single person, and then the other person becomes his intercessor (*shāfi’*) in the matter, and his entreaty on his behalf concerning his affair is an intercession (*shafā’a*). . . .

¶ And beware of a day when no soul shall settle any right due to God, or to anyone else, for another, and God shall not accept the intercession of any intercessor for it to absolve it of any right due against it.

It is said that God addressed the people of this verse by the contents of His address to them because they were from the Jews of the Children of Israel and they had said: ‘We are the children of God, those beloved by Him, the children of His prophets, and our forefathers will intercede for us before Him.’ So God informed them that no soul shall settle anything for another at the Resurrection, and that He will not accept the intercession of anyone for them then, so that each one of them who has rights will be given his due.

⇒ ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān:

The Messenger of God said: ‘Assuredly, she that is hornless will take revenge on her that is horned on the Day of the Resurrection, as God has said: «And We shall set up the just balances for the Resurrection Day, so that not one soul shall be wronged anything; even if it be the weight of one grain of mustard-seed, We shall produce it, and We are sufficient as reckoners.»’ (21: 47) [880]

Thus God caused them to despair of what they had given their souls to hope for, of being saved—by the intercession of their forefathers and all other people—from God’s punishment despite their denying the truth that they know and their opposition to God’s command to follow Muḥammad and what he brought from God. He informed them that the only thing which will be of use to them before Him will be their repentance before Him of their disbelief, and their turning from errancy. He made what He had prescribed concerning them a standard for everyone who is on a similar path to them, so that no heretic might have any hope of His mercy.

Although in recitation this verse has the form of a general statement,

in interpretation it has a particular intention, because of the evidence of reports from the Messenger of God that he said:

There will be intercession by me for those of my community who have committed major sins.

There is no prophet who has not been given a supplication; and I have concealed my supplication as an intercession for my community. It will reach, God willing, those of them who associate nothing with God.²

It is clear from this that, through the intercession of our prophet, Muḥammad, for them, God may grant a reprieve to His believing servants for a great deal of the punishment for the wrongs they commit against each other and against Him, and that His words «and no intercession shall be accepted for it» apply only to him who dies in his disbelief without repenting before God. This is not the place in which to prolong the discussion of intercession, and the Promise and the Threat, and for us to argue exhaustively about it. We shall come to give a sufficient explanation of this in the ‘appropriate’ places, God willing.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ YU’KHADHU MIN-HĀ ‘ADLUN

«‘Adl» in the speech of the Arabs . . . ‘means’¹ ‘redemption’ (*fidya*).

⇒ Abu ‘l-‘Āliya, concerning this verse:

‘«‘Adl»’¹ means ‘redemption (*fidā*)’’. [881]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«Nor any redemption be taken for it»: as for ‘*adl*, . . . He says: ‘‘Even’¹ if ‘a soul’¹ were to bring gold enough to fill the earth with which to redeem itself, it would not be accepted from it.’ [882]

⇒ Qatāda:

‘Even’¹ if it brought everything, it would not be accepted from it. [883]

⇒ Ibn ‘Abbās, concerning this verse:

‘It means’¹ ‘compensation (*badal*)’, and *badal* is ‘redemption’. [884]

(. . .)

A redemption for something, or a compensation for it, is called ‘*adl*’ because it counterbalances it.³ Even though it is not of the same kind, it

comes to be of the same kind from the aspect of recompense, 'although' not from the aspect of form and external appearance. He has said: «though it offer every equivalent ('*adl*'), it shall not be taken from it» (6: 70), meaning 'though it offer every redemption, it shall not be taken from it'....

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LĀ HUM YUNṢARŪNA*

The interpretation of «neither shall they be helped» is . . . that on that day no one will come to help them, just as no one will intercede for them, and no redemption will be accepted for them. Partiality is abolished there; bribes and intercessions disappear; mutual assistance and help between people are eliminated; judgement ends up with the Just Almighty before Whom intercessors and helpers are of no avail. Evil will be requited with its equivalent, and good with many times more. This is similar to what He has said: «And halt them, to be questioned: *'Why do you not help one another?' *No indeed; but today they resign themselves in submission» (37: 24-6).

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, concerning (37: 25):

«'Why do you not help one another?': 'Why do you not protect each other from Us?' How wrong! They will not have this today! [887]

§ Ṭabarī mentions two other opinions about «*wa-lā hum yunṣarūna*» which he finds acceptable.

¹ The verb *shafa'a* has the basic meaning of 'to double', and the noun *shaf'* means 'one of a pair'.

² Ṭabarī gives no chains of transmission for these two Traditions, but they are both attested Traditions. The first can be found in the canonical collections of Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī, and elsewhere, narrated from Anas b. Mālik, and the second in those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim from the same source. See Sh. & Sh., II, 33, n. 2.

³ '*Adl*' normally has the meaning of 'equitableness' or 'justice'.

2: 49

وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ
يُذَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذٰلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ
مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ

*wa-idh najjainā-kum min āli Fir'auna yasūmūna-kum sū'a 'l-'adhābi
yudhabbiḥūna abnā'a-kum wa-yastahyūna nisā'a-kum wa-ft dhālikum
balā'un min rabbi-kum 'aẓīmun*

And when We delivered you from the followers of Pharaoh who were visiting you with evil chastisement, slaughtering your sons, and sparing your women; and in that was a great blessing from your Lord.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH NAJJAINĀ-KUM MIN ĀLI FIR'AUNA*

As for the interpretation of His words «And when We delivered you», they are connected to His words «O Children of Israel, remember My blessing». It is as if He had said: 'Remember My blessings wherewith I blessed you, and remember Our act of kindness towards you—when We delivered you from the followers of Pharaoh—by saving you from them.'

As for «*āli Fir'aun*», they were the followers of his religion, his people and his partisans. *Āl* comes from *ahl* (=kin, folk, followers) with a change of the *hā'* (-h-) into a *hamza*, just as they say *mā'* (=water) 'from the root *m-w-h*', changing the *hā'* into a *hamza*, although when they form the diminutive they say *muwaih*, bringing back the *hā'*, and taking 'the word' back to its original root. It is the same when they form the diminutive of *āl*, and say *uhail*. . .

(...)

The most suitable places for *āl* 'to be used' are when it is spoken 'in combination' with famous names, as when they talk about the *āl* of the prophet Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, the *āl* of 'Alī, the *āl* of 'Abbās, the *āl* of 'Aqīl. But it is not thought appropriate to use it with people who are not well-known, or in combination with

the names of geographical locations and the like 'where it means 'the people of . . .'. The experts of the Arabic language do not approve of someone saying 'I saw the *āl* of the man', or 'The *āl* of the woman saw me', nor 'do they approve of' 'I saw the *āl* of Baṣra', or 'the *āl* of Kūfa'. Some Arabs are mentioned as having been heard to say 'I saw the *āl* of Mecca', or 'the *āl* of Medina', but this is not in widespread usage in their speech.

As for «Pharaoh», it is said that it is a name by which the kings of the Amalekites of Egypt were called, just as some of the kings of the Romans were called 'Caesar', and some of them were called 'Heraclius', and just as the kings of Persia were called the 'Khosrows' and one of them was called 'Khosrow', and the kings of the Yemen were called 'Tabābi'a' and one of them 'Tubba'.

As for the Pharaoh of Moses, from whom God narrated that He had saved the Children of Israel, it is said that his name was al-Walīd b. Muṣ'ab b. al-Raiyān [=Ibn Ishāq, 888].¹

It is possible to say «And when We delivered you from the followers of Pharaoh» when those addressed had never seen Pharaoh or been saved from him, because the addressees were the children of those whom He had saved from Pharaoh and his people, and He attributes His blessing on their forefathers to them.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *YASŪMŪNA-KUM* *SŪ'A 'L-'ADHĀBI*

There are two aspects to the interpretation of «*yasūmūna-kum*». One of them is that it begins a new clause about Pharaoh's dealings with the Children of Israel, and in this case it means: 'Remember My blessings to you when I delivered you from the people of Pharaoh; and before they used to visit you with evil chastisement'. . . .

The second aspect is that «*yasūmūna-kum*» expresses a state, and the interpretation in this case is: 'And when We delivered you from the followers of Pharaoh, who were visiting you with evil chastisement', and it describes the state of the followers of Pharaoh. . . .

As for the interpretation of His words «*sū'a 'l-'adhāb*», He means 'the chastisement which was bad for them'. Some of 'the interpreters' have said that 'it means' 'the severest chastisement', but if this had been the meaning, it would have been *aswā'a 'l-'adhāb*.

QUESTION: What was this chastisement which they visited upon them, which was bad for them?

REPLY: It is what God described in His Book when He said «slaughtering your sons, and sparing your women». Muḥammad b. Ishāq said concerning this:

⇒Ibn Ishāq:

Pharaoh chastised the Children of Israel. He made them slaves and chattels, he categorized them according to the labour he 'assigned to them': one category were builders, one category were ploughmen, and one category raised crops for him. . . . Whichever of them was not engaged in one of his tasks for him had tax 'levied' on him—'Pharaoh' visited 'it' upon them—as God said: «evil chastisement». ² [889]

And al-Suddī said [890]: 'He allotted them squalid tasks, and began killing their sons and sparing their women.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *YUDHABBIḤŪNA ANBĀ'A-KUM* *WA-YASTAḤYŪNA NISĀ'A-KUM*

God attributed what the followers of Pharaoh did to the Children of Israel—their visiting them with an evil chastisement, slaughtering their sons and sparing their women—to them and not to Pharaoh, although they did what they did to them on account of Pharaoh's power and as a result of his command, because they carried it out themselves. Thus it is clear that everyone who himself carries out the killing of someone or inflicts suffering on a life, even though it is as the result of someone else's command, is the agent who undertakes it; and he deserves its being attributed to him, even if the person who issues the command—be he a ruler, a destructive brigand, or a dissolute tyrant—compels the agent who is commanded to 'do' it. Likewise, He attributed the slaughter of the sons of the Children of Israel and the sparing of their women to the followers of Pharaoh, and not to Pharaoh, even though they did what they did on account of Pharaoh's power and as a result of his command, together with his tyranny over them and his 'power to' compel them. Thus every killing 'carried out' on the command of another is injustice, and 'the killer', according to us, is to be killed in retaliation, even if he was forced to kill by someone else.

As for the interpretation of their slaughtering the Children of Israel

and sparing their women, it is 'given' in what has been reported to us from Ibn 'Abbās and others, e.g.:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Pharaoh and his companions recalled among themselves what God had promised Abraham, His Friend, that He would appoint prophets and kings among his offspring. So they deliberated and agreed that he send out men with butchers' knives to move around among the Children of Israel and to slaughter every newborn male child that they found; and they did so. However, when they saw that the elderly among the Children of Israel were dying at their appointed time, and that the young were being slaughtered, 'Pharaoh' said: 'You are on the point of exterminating the Children of Israel; so you will end up having to perform the tasks and services which they have been saving you the trouble of doing yourselves!' So kill every newborn male one year, and their sons will become few in number, and leave off 'killing them' the next year.' The mother of Moses bore Aaron during a year in which the boys were not slaughtered, so she gave birth to him openly and safely, till, when the next 'year' came, she bore Moses. [891]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The soothsayers said to Pharaoh: 'A child will be born this year who will destroy your reign.' (...) So Pharaoh appointed a hundred men over every thousand women: 'ten' men for every hundred 'women', one man for ten 'women'. And he said 'to them': 'Keep a watch over every pregnant woman in the town, and when she gives birth, observe 'the child': if it is male, slaughter it, but if it is female, let it go. These were His words: «slaughtering your sons, and sparing your women; and in that was a grievous trial from your Lord.» [892]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

Pharaoh ruled over them for 400 years, then the soothsayers said that that year a boy would be born in Egypt who would destroy him with his own hand. So he sent out midwives among the people of Egypt, and when a woman gave birth to a boy, he was brought to Pharaoh and he killed him, but he spared the girls. [893; see also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 894]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

It happened to Pharaoh that he saw in a dream of his that a fire approached from Jerusalem till it enclosed the buildings of Egypt; it burnt the Copts but it spared the Children of Israel, and it lay waste to the buildings of Egypt. So he called the magicians, soothsayers, ornithomancers, physiognomancers, and diviners, and asked them about his vision. They said to him: 'A man will come forth from this land from which the Children of Israel came'—they meant Jerusalem—'for whose sake Egypt will be destroyed.' So he commanded that every boy born to the Children of Israel should be slaughtered, but that any girl born to them should be left. Then he said to the Copts: 'Regard your bondsmen (*mamlūkūn*) who toil outdoors; bring them in and set the Children of Israel to take over these squalid tasks.' So he set the Children of Israel to do the labour of their slaves, and they brought in their slaves. This is when God said: «Now Pharaoh had exalted himself in the land»—meaning that he acted despotically over the land—«and had made its inhabitants into 'various' parties»—meaning the Children of Israel, when he set them to do the 'se' squalid tasks—«abasing one group of them, slaughtering their sons» (28: 4). He brought about that every child born to the Children of Israel was slaughtered, and that the young never grew up. God cast death among the old men of the Children of Israel, and it swept speedily among them. Then the heads of the Copts came in to Pharaoh to speak with him, and said: 'Death has descended upon these people, and our slaves will soon have to do the labour. We slaughter their sons thus, the youths do not grow up, and the old pass away. If only you would leave some of their sons.' So he commanded that one year they should slaughter, and the next they should desist. So Aaron was born in a year in which they did not slaughter, and he was spared, but, when the year in which they slaughtered came, she was pregnant with Moses. [895]

(..)

... According to the interpretation of those who hold the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, Abu 'l-Āliya, and al-Rabī' b. Anas about the interpretation of His words «and sparing your women», that it is their refraining from killing females when they were born, it necessarily follows that it is permissible to call a female infant during her childhood and after her

birth *imra'a* (= woman), and 'to call' a young girl while she is still a child *nisā'* (= woman), for they have interpreted the words of God «and sparing your women (*nisā'*)» 'as meaning' 'leaving the female infants at birth and not killing them'.

But Ibn Juraij has denied this opinion of theirs:

⇒ Ibn Juraij, concerning this verse:

'It means:' Enslaving your women. [898]

By saying this, Ibn Juraij departed from what those who held the opinion we have mentioned about His words «sparing your women», that it 'means' the sparing of the lives of female infants, since he did not believe that 'female infants' should be called *nisā'*, but then he entered into something which was more serious than what he was denying, when he interpreted «*yastahyūna*» as 'enslaved'; but this interpretation exists nowhere either in the Arabic language or in non-Arabic 'languages'....

Others interpreted «*yudhabbiḥūna abnā'a-kum*» as meaning 'they slaughtered your men, the fathers of your children', and they denied that they slaughtered the infants—and He associated the women with them. They say: 'In God's report that the spared were the women is a clear indication that those who were slaughtered were the men and not the children, for, if the slaughtered were boys, it would have 'been said' that the spared were girls.'...

As well as departing from the interpretation of the Companions and Followers who were interpreters, those who hold this opinion have disregarded where the correct 'opinion' lies. That is to say that God informed Moses' mother through inspiration, commanding her to suckle Moses and 'told her' that when she feared for him she should place him into the casket and cast him into the open sea. It is clear from this that if the people 'of Pharaoh' had only been killing the men and sparing the women, there would have been no need for Moses' mother to cast Moses into the open sea, or, if Moses had been a 'grown up' man, his mother would not have put him in the casket.

In our opinion, this 'passage refers to' the slaughter of the male children by the followers of Pharaoh, and their leaving the female children, as it was interpreted by Ibn 'Abbās and those whose opinion we have previously narrated. It was said «sparing your women», since female children were included with their mothers—and there is no doubt that their mothers were women (*nisā'*)—in being spared, because they killed neither the young women nor the old, so it was said «sparing

your women», meaning thereby the mothers and the newborn females, just as one would say 'He approached the men (*al-rijāl*)', although there were boys among them. . . . However, among the males, since only the newborn were slaughtered, it was said «slaughtering your sons», and not 'slaughtering your men'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-FĪ DHĀLIKUM BALĀ'UN MIN RABBI-KUM 'AẒĪMUN

¶ And in what We did for you, in saving you from the chastisement of the followers of Pharaoh in which you 'found yourselves', as I described, there was a great blessing from your Lord.

By «*balā'*» He means 'blessing (*ni'ma*)' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 899; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 900; ⇒ Mujāhid, 901, 902; ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 903].

The origin of 'the word' *balā'* in the speech of the Arabs is 'trial (*ikhtibār*)' and 'test (*imtiḥān*)', then it came to be used for 'good and evil', because a trial or a test can be good or bad, as our Lord has said: «And We tried them (*balaunā-hum*) with good things and evil, that haply they should return» (7: 168) . . . , and «and We try you (*nabluwa-kum*) with evil and good for a testing» (21: 35). Moreover the Arabs call good '*balā'*' and bad '*balā'*', although the Ist form of the verb is used more for evil, and the IVth form for good.‡

¹ According to Ibn Ishāq, cited in Tabarī's *History*, the Amalekite Pharaohs came to power in Egypt after the death of Joseph. Al-Walīd was the cruellest of these, and reigned the longest. See: Tabarī (1879), I, 444ff.

² This is part of the Tradition from Ibn Ishāq in Tabarī's *History* mentioned in the previous note.

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمُ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ
وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

*wa-idh faraqnā bi-kumu 'l-baḥra fa-anjainā-kum wa-aghraqnā āla
Fir'auna wa-antum tanẓurūna*

And when We divided the sea for you and delivered you, and
drowned Pharaoh's followers while you were beholding.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH FARAQNĀ
BI-KUMU 'L-BAḤRA*

As for the interpretation of His words «And when We divided the sea for you», they are connected to «And when We delivered you», meaning: And remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and remember when We delivered you from the followers of Pharaoh, and when We divided the sea for you.

The meaning of «We divided the sea for you» is 'We parted the seas for you', because there were twelve tribes of Israelites, and He divided the sea into twelve paths: each tribe followed one of the paths. . . .

⇒ Al-Suddī:

When Moses came to the sea, he named it 'Abū Khālīd'. He struck and it split apart.¹ Every divide was like a great mountain, and the Children of Israel entered in. There were twelve paths in the sea, a tribe in each path. [904]

§ Ṭabarī discounts as being against the ostensive wording of the reading the interpretation of a Baṣran grammarian that God held back the water when the Israelites came to it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-ANJAINĀ-KUM
WA-AGHRAQNĀ ĀLA FIR'AUNA
WA-ANTUM TANẒURŪNA*

QUESTION: How did God drown the followers of Pharaoh while saving the Children of Israel?

REPLY

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Shaddād b. al-Hād al-Laithī:

I was told that Pharaoh went out in search of Moses at the head of seventy thousand black horses—besides the dappled horses in his army. Moses went forth until the sea faced him and he was unable to turn away from it, and Pharaoh came into view behind them in the midst of his army. «And, when the two hosts sighted each other, the companions of Moses said: 'We are overtaken!' He»—Moses—«said: 'No, indeed; surely my Lord is with me; He will guide me» (26: 61–2)—i.e., to safety—He has promised me this, and He does not go back on His promise.' [905]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

God informed the sea by inspiration—according to what I have been told—: 'When Moses strikes you with his staff, split apart for him.' (...) 'The waves of' the sea began to dash against each other in fear of God, and awaited His command. Then God informed Moses by inspiration: 'Strike the sea with your staff', so he struck it with it. In 'the staff' was the authority of God which He had given him, so it split apart; and each divide was like a great mountain, that it to say, like a mountain rising up from high ground. God said to Moses: «'Strike for them a dry path in the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, nor afraid.'» (20: 77) When the sea had settled into a dry, firm path for him, Moses proceeded along it with the Children of Israel, and Pharaoh pursued him with his troops. [906]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh b. Shaddād b. al-Hād al-Laithī:

I have been told that when the Children of Israel had entered into the sea, and not a single one of them was left behind, Pharaoh advanced on one of his stallions till he came to a halt at the edge of the sea which was fixed in the state it was in, but the stallion was afraid to pass through. Then Gabriel appeared to him on a mare on heat, and brought her close to him. Then the stallion caught her scent, and when it had caught her scent, 'Gabriel' spurred her forward, and the stallion on which Pharaoh 'was mounted' moved forward with her. When Pharaoh's army saw that Pharaoh had entered 'into the sea', they followed Pharaoh and entered with him with Gabriel in front of him; and 'the angel' Michael, 'mounted' on a mare at their rear, urged them on, saying: 'Keep

up with your companions.' Then, when Gabriel drew out of the sea, there was no one in front of him, and Michael took up his position on the other side, and there was no one behind him, and the sea engulfed them. Then, when he saw the authority and power of God, Pharaoh recognized his humiliation, his soul forsook him, and he shouted: «'T'here is no god but He in whom the Children of Israel believe; I am of those that surrender.'» (10: 90) [907]

⇒'Amr b. Maimūn al-Audī:

When Moses went out with the Children of Israel, news of this reached Pharaoh, and he said: 'Do not follow them until the cock crows.' (...) By God, that night the cock did not crow until morning. Then he called for a sheep and it was slaughtered. Then he said: 'I shall not finish its liver until six hundred thousand Copts have been brought together to me.' And he did not finish its liver until six hundred thousand Copts had been brought together to him. Then he set out.

When Moses reached the sea, one of his men, who was called Yūsha' b. Nūn, said to him: 'Where did your Lord order you 'to go', Moses?' He said: 'Right ahead of you', pointing to the sea. So Yūsha' forced his horse to go into the sea until he was submerged, and it carried him away. Then he returned, and said: 'Where did your Lord order you 'to go', Moses? By God, you do not lie nor are you deceived.' And he did this three times. Then God inspired in Moses «'Strike the sea with your staff'; and it clave, and each part was a mighty mount» (26: 63), meaning 'like a mountain'. (...) Then Moses and those with him set forth, and Pharaoh followed them in their path, until, when they had all gone in, God closed it over them. This is why He said: «and We drowned Pharaoh's followers while you were beholding».

Ma'mar¹, one of the transmitters,¹ said: Qatāda said: 'With Moses there were six hundred thousand, and Pharaoh followed him on one million, one hundred thousand horses.' [908]

§ Ṭabarī quotes further extended Traditions from Ibn 'Abbās [909], al-Suddī [910], and Ibn Zaid [911], which contain elements from the previous narrations with variations in such details as the numbers of troops and horses. Al-Suddī gives as the reason why the Copts delayed their pursuit of the

Children of Israel until sunrise,² that they woke before sunrise to bury their firstborn males who had been visited with death. Ibn Zaid reports a lengthy conversation between Moses and the sea.

¶ «while you were beholding»: You beheld God's dividing the sea for you, and His destruction of Pharaoh's followers in the very place where He had saved you, and the greatness of His authority—in the sea's obedience to Him, in its becoming piled up and gapped like the form of towering mountains, not leaving its limits, submitting to His command, and yielding in obedience to Him, while it was a liquified fluid before that—'all of' which He showed you.

He thereby informed them of where His proofs 'came' to them, and reminded them of His blessings towards their ancestors, and warned them, concerning their giving the lie to His prophet, Muḥammad, lest what befell Pharaoh and his followers for giving Moses the lie should befall them.

(...)

¹ According to another Tradition from al-Suddī [910], it was Aaron who first struck the sea, but the sea did not recognize him. Then Moses struck it after giving it the name 'Abū Khālīd', and it split apart.

² See 26: 60.

2: 51

وَإِذْ وَعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِنْ
بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

*wa-idh wā'adnā Mūsā arba'ina lailatan thumma 'ttakhadhtumu 'l-'ijla
min ba'di-hi wa-antum ḡālimūna*

And when We appointed with Moses forty nights, then you took the Calf to yourselves after him and you were evil-doers;

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDH WĀ'ADNĀ

[R]: FIRST OPINION: Some of them read «wā'adnā», meaning that God appointed with Moses to come to Mount Sinai (al-Ṭūr) for the conversation (*munājāt*); the appointment was 'made' by God with

Moses and also by Moses with his Lord. Part of their proof for their preference of «*wāʾadnā*» over «*waʾadnā*» is that they said: Every mutual appointment (*ittiʿād*) is between two persons to meet and come together, and each of them makes an appointment with his companion for this. Therefore, they claimed, the recitation . . . «*wāʾadnā*» must be chosen in preference to the recitation . . . «*waʾadnā*».

SECOND OPINION: Some of them read «*wāʾadnā*», meaning that God is the One who promises, the only one to promise, and no one else. Part of their proof for their preference is that they said: An appointment (*muwāʾada* 'from *wāʾada*') is made between men, but God is alone in making the Promise and the Threat for every good and evil. They said: The revelation in the whole Qurʾān confirms this; thus He said «God surely promised you a true promise» (14: 22), and . . . «And when God promised you one of the two parties should be yours» (8: 7). They said: Similarly He must be the only one with the promise in His words «*wa-idh waʾadnā Mūsā*».

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: According to us, the correct opinion about this is that they are two readings which the community has accepted and which the reciters recite, and the reading of neither of them invalidates the meaning of the other; although in one of them there is more meaning than in the other with respect to the ostensive wording and the recitation, but with respect to what is understood (*mafhūm*) from them both, they are in harmony. That is to say that whenever it is said of someone that he promised to meet someone else at a particular place, it is understood that the person to whom this promise was made arranged to meet his companion in that place, just as his companion promised him, since he made the promise to him on the basis of an agreement between them. It is clear that his Lord only promised to meet Moses on Mount Sinai with Moses' consent, for there is no doubt that Moses accepted everything which God commanded him to do and that he hastened to do His liking in this respect. It is 'also' clear that God would not have promised Moses this without Moses acceding to it. Since this is the case, it is clear that God 'both' promised and made an appointment with Moses for the conversation on Mount Sinai, and that Moses 'both' promised his Lord and made an appointment to meet Him. No matter which of the two readings 'one recites' . . . he reaches the truth about this—from the aspect of interpretation and language—because of the reasons we have already given.

§ Ṭabarī dismisses the view that *wāʾada* can only be used of God on the grounds that, in the case of a meeting, it is common to speak of each person promising (*wāʾada*) to meet the other, and of them arranging to meet (*wāʾada*).

THE INTERPRETATION OF *MŪSĀ*

According to what has reached us, *Mūsā* (= Moses) is 'composed' of two words in Coptic, '*mū*', which means 'water (*mā*)', and '*shā*', which means 'trees (*shajar*)'. According to what has reached us, he was so called because when his mother put him into the casket, when she feared for him from Pharaoh, and cast him onto the sea as God had inspired her to do—it is said that the sea into which she cast him was the Nile—the waves of the sea carried him along until they pushed him among trees/reeds¹ at Pharaoh's house. And the maids of Āsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, came out to bathe, and found the casket and took it out 'of the water'. Then he was called by the name of the place where he landed, and that was by a place where there was water and trees, and he was called '*Mūsā*'—water and trees. [⇒Al-Suddī, 912]

He was *Mūsā* b. 'Imrān b. Yaṣhar b. Qāhith b. Lāwī b. Ya'qūb Isrā'īl Allāh b. Ishāq Dhabīh Allāh (= 'God's Slaughtered One') b. Ibrāhīm Khalīl Allāh, according to what Ibn Ishāq claimed [913].

THE INTERPRETATION OF *ARBA'ĪNA LAILATAN*

¶ When We appointed with Moses a full forty nights. And all the forty nights were included in the appointment.

A Baṣran grammarian claimed that it meant: And when We made an appointment with Moses for the end of 'a period of' forty nights . . . But this is contrary to what the reports of the interpreters say, and also to the ostensive reading.

As for the ostensive reading, God has said that He appointed with Moses forty nights, and no one may turn the exoteric sense of His statement into an esoteric sense without a proof which indicates its correctness.

As for the interpreters, they say what I shall mention.

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

«And when We appointed with Moses forty nights», that is, 'the month of' Dhu 'l-Qa'da and ten 'nights' of 'the month of' Dhu 'l-Hijja. This was when Moses left his companions and appointed

Aaron in his place, and remained forty nights on Mount Sinai. And the Torah was revealed to him on the Tablets—and the Tablets were of hailstone (*barad*)—and the Lord approached him in seclusion and spoke with him, and he heard the scratching of the Pen. It has reached us that he did not answer the calls of nature during the forty nights until he came down from Mount Sinai. [914. Also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 915]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

God promised Moses—when He had destroyed Pharaoh and his followers, and had saved him and his people—thirty nights. Then He supplemented 'this' by ten 'nights'. So the time appointed by his Lord became a whole forty nights during which his Lord would meet him as he wished. Moses appointed Aaron in his place over the Children of Israel, and said: 'I am hastening to my Lord, so take my place among my people, and do not follow the way of the evil-doers. Then Moses went out to his Lord, hastening to meet him, and yearning for Him, and Aaron stayed among the Children of Israel—and with him was the Samaritan—and he went with them in the track¹ of Moses so as to get them to catch up with him. [916]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

Then Moses went away and appointed Aaron in his place over the Children of Israel. And he arranged to meet with them in thirty nights 'time', but God supplemented these with ten 'more nights'. [917, see 919 below, of which this is a part]

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA 'TTAKHADHTUMU
'L-'IJLA MIN BA'DI-HI
WA-ANTUM ZĀLIMŪNA

The interpretation of «then you took the Calf to yourselves after him» is: Then you took the Calf as a god during the days of Moses' appointment. And the pronoun «him» in «after him» refers back to the mention of Moses.

He informed the Jews of the Children of Israel who opposed the Prophet¹, Muḥammad,¹ and gave him the lie, who were addressed by this verse, about what their forefathers and ancestors did, and how they gave His Messengers the lie, thereby informing them that they . . . were following the path of their forefathers and ancestors; and warned them lest His authority come down upon them for persisting in this denial of

theirs 'just as' the transmutation,² the cursing,³ and the varieties of retribution came down on their forefathers who gave the Messengers the lie.

The causes for their taking the Calf to themselves were:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

When Pharaoh and his companions made for the sea, Pharaoh was 'mounted' on a black stallion with a full tail. And when he made for the sea, the stallion was afraid to leap into the sea. Then Gabriel appeared before him on a mare in heat, and, when 'the stallion' saw her, he leapt in after her.

(...) But the Samaritan knew Gabriel, because when his mother had been afraid that he would be slaughtered she had left him in a cave and had closed it up on him.⁴ Then Gabriel had come to him and fed him with his fingers: in one of his fingers there was milk, in another honey, and in another clarified butter. And he continued to feed him until he had grown up. So when he saw him by the sea he recognized him, and he grabbed a handful 'of dust' from the spoor of his mare. (...) He took a handful from under the hoof.

Sufyān 'b. 'Uyaina, one of the transmitters¹ said: Ibn Mas'ūd used to recite «'and I grabbed a handful 'of dust' from the spoor of the Messenger's horse'» (20: 96).

Ibn 'Abbās: It was cast into the Samaritan's mind: 'You will not throw this onto anything saying "Become this and that" without it 'so' becoming.' So the handful 'of dust' remained with him in his hand until he had passed through the sea. When Moses and the Children of Israel had passed through the sea, and God had drowned the people of Pharaoh, Moses said to his brother Aaron: 'Take my place over my people and be righteous.' And Moses went for the appointment with his Lord.

There was with the Children of Israel some jewelry of the people of Pharaoh which they had taken on loan, and it was as if they shunned the evil of it, so they took it out for the fire to come down and consume it. But when they had gathered it together, the Samaritan lifted up the handful 'of dust' which was in his hand like this, and flung it into it—and Ibn 'Abbās* made a gesture with his hand like this—and said: 'Be a calf's body which lows!'⁵ And it

* Sh. & Sh., II, p. 64, l. 15, has 'Ibn Ishāq', which cannot be correct.

became a calf's body which lowed,⁶ and the wind went in through its backside and came out through its mouth, and a sound was heard from it. Then he said: «'This is your god and the god of Moses'» (20: 88), and they were obsessed by it and worshipped it. Then Aaron said: «'My people, you have been charmed by it. Verily your Lord is the All-merciful, so follow me and obey my command.' They said: 'We shall not give up our devotion to it until Moses returns to us.'» (20: 90-1) [918. See also ⇒Ibn Ishāq, 920; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 922; ⇒Mujāhid, 923, 925, 926]

(..)

⇒Al-Suddī:

When God commanded Moses to leave with the Children of Israel—i.e., 'to leave' Egypt—Moses commanded them to leave, and commanded them to borrow jewelry from the Copts. When God delivered Moses and the Children of Israel who were with him from the sea, and drowned the people of Pharaoh, Gabriel came to Moses to take him to God. He approached on a horse, and the Samaritan saw him and did not recognize him, and said: 'This is the horse of life!' Then he said when he saw him: 'There is something important about this 'man'!' Then he took some dust from the hoof—the horse's hoof.

Then Moses went away and appointed Aaron in his place over the Children of Israel. And he arranged to meet with them in thirty nights 'time', but God supplemented them with ten 'more nights'. Then Aaron said to them: 'O Children of Israel, booty is not lawful for you, and the jewelry of the Copts is indeed booty. So gather it together and dig a pit for it and bury it; if Moses comes, he will declare it lawful for you to take, otherwise it will be something you cannot spend lawfully.' So they gathered that jewelry together in this pit, and the Samaritan came with this handful 'of dust' and flung it in, and God brought forth a calf's body, lowing.

The Children of Israel calculated the time till Moses' meeting 'with them', and they counted the nights as days and the days as days. Then, when twenty 'days' had passed, the calf came out 'of the pit', and, when they saw it, the Samaritan said to them: «'This is your god and the god of Moses, for he has forgotten'» (20: 88), meaning 'he has left his god behind here and gone in search of

him'. Then they became obsessed by it, worshipping it, and it used to low and pace around. So Aaron said to them: 'O Children of Israel, you are just being tempted by it.'—meaning 'you are just being tried by it', i.e., the Calf—'Indeed, your Lord is the All-merciful.' Aaron and those of the Children of Israel who were with him stayed and did not fight them.

Moses had hurried to his god to speak with him, and when He spoke with him He said to him: «'What has sped you away from your people, Moses?' He said: 'They are close behind me. And I have hastened to You, Lord, that You might be pleased.' He said: 'We tempted your people after you 'left them'. The Samaritan has led them astray.'» (20: 83-5) Then He told him what had happened to them. Moses said: 'O Lord, this Samaritan ordered them to take the Calf to themselves. What about the spirit? Who breathed it into it?' The Lord said: 'I 'did'.' He said: 'Lord, You have led them astray then.' [919]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

It was called *al-'ijl* (=the Calf) because they hastened (*'ajilū*) and took it for themselves before Moses came to them [924]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-ANTUM ZĀLIMŪNA*

¶ And you set up worship where it did not belong, for no worship is proper except to God; and you worshipped the Calf which was transgression on your part.

(...)

We have shown previously in our book that the basis of every transgression is the putting of something where it does not belong.⁷ ...

¹ For *shajar*, see *Exeg.* 2: 35, p. 247.

² See 36: 67.

³ See, e.g., 4: 47.

⁴ In another Tradition ⇒Ibn 'Abbās [921]: The name of the Samaritan was Mūsā b. Zafar.

⁵ In the other Tradition ⇒Ibn 'Abbās [921]: The Samaritan was one of the people of Bājarmā, and he was one of those who worshipped the cow. In his soul was love of the worship of the cow, but he made a show of Islam to the Children of Israel.

⁶ See 20: 87-8.

⁷ See *Exeg.* 2: 35, p. 249.

2: 52

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

thumma 'afaunā 'an-kum min ba'di dhālika la'alla-kum tashkurūna

then We pardoned you after that, so that you might be thankful.

(. .)

The meaning of «*la'alla*» in this place is 'so that (*kai*)'. I have already explained that one of the meanings of *la'alla* is 'so that'.¹

The meaning of this passage is thus: 'then We pardoned you after you took the Calf to yourselves as a god, so that you might be thankful for My pardoning you', since a pardon necessarily demands thanks, according to people of understanding and reason.

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 21, pp. 162–3.

2: 53

وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

wa-idh ātainā Mūsa 'l-kitāba wa-'l-furqāna la'alla-kum tahtadūna

And when We gave Moses the scripture and the discrimination,
so that you might be guided.

He means by His words «And when We gave Moses the scripture»: And remember also when We gave Moses the scripture and the discrimination (*furqān*). By the 'scripture', He means the Torah, and by the 'discrimination' the 'arbiter between truth and falsehood'.

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, concerning this passage:

He discriminated by 'the Furqān' between truth and falsehood.
[928]

⇒ Mujāhid, concerning this passage:

The 'scripture' is the discrimination, a discrimination between truth and falsehood. [929; see also 930, 931]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The 'discrimination' is a composite name for the Torah, the Evangel, the Psalms, and the Furqān¹, i.e., the Qur'ān¹. [932]

Ibn Zaid said about this:

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

I asked him—i.e., Ibn Zaid—about the words of God «And when We gave Moses the scripture and the discrimination», and he said: 'As for the "discrimination", about which God said: «on the day of the discrimination, the day the two hosts encountered» (8: 41), that was the day of 'the battle of' Badr, the day when God discriminated between truth and falsehood, and the judgement by which He discriminated between truth and falsehood. (...) Similarly God gave Moses the discrimination. God discriminated between them, and protected him and delivered him; He discriminated between them through victory. Just as God set it between Muḥammad and the polytheists, so He set it between Moses and Pharaoh.' [933]

The preferable interpretation of the verse is the narration from Ibn 'Abbās, Abu 'l-Āliya, and Mujāhid, according to which the discrimination, which God mentioned in this place that He gave Moses, is the scripture by which He discriminates between truth and falsehood, which is a description of the Torah and an attribute of it.

¶ And when We gave Moses the Torah, which We wrote for him on the Tablets, and by which We discriminated between truth and falsehood.

(...)

We have already explained the meaning of 'scripture (*kitāb*)' in the preceding part of our book, and that it means 'that which is' written'.¹ . . .

As for the interpretation of His words «so that you might be guided», it is similar to the interpretation of His words «so that you might give thanks» (2: 52). . . . It is as if He said: And remember also when We gave Moses the Torah which discriminates between truth

and falsehood so that you might be guided by it, and might follow the truth which is in it, because I have made it thus a guidance for him who takes it as a guide and follows what is in it.

¹ See Intro., pp. 40-44, and n. 58, where *furqān* is also discussed.

2: 54

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يُقَوْمِ إِنِّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ
بِاتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَىٰ بَارِيكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ
ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارِيكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ
التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

*wa-idh qāla Mūsā li-qaumi-hī yā-qaumi inna-kum ḡalamtum anfusa-
kum bi-'ttikhādhi-kumu 'l-'ijla fa-tūbū ilā bārī'i-kum fa-'qtulū anfusa-
kum dhāli-kum khairun la-kum 'inda bārī'i-kum fa-tāba 'alay-kum
inna-hū huwa 'l-tawwābu 'l-rahīmu*

And when Moses said to his people: 'My people, you have done wrong against yourselves by taking the Calf; now turn to your Creator and slay one another. That will be better for you before your Creator. And He turned to you; truly He turns, and is All-Compassionate.'

¶ AND remember also when Moses said to his people from the Children of Israel: 'My people, you have done wrong against yourselves.'

(...)

Everyone who does something which merits punishment from God does wrong against his self by necessitating the punishment against it from God. . . . We have already shown that the meaning of 'turning to' (*tawba*, = repentance) is 'returning from what displeases God to the obedience to Him which pleases Him'.¹

The people complied with the command which Moses gave them,

to repent from the sins they had committed against their Lord, just as he had commanded them.

(. .)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Moses said to his people: 'Turn to your Creator and slay one another. That will be better for you before your Creator, and He will turn to you; truly He turns, and is All-compassionate.'² (...) Moses commanded his people—following his Lord's command—to slay one another. (...) So those who were devoted to the Calf sat down with their cloaks gathered round them, while those who were not devoted to the Calf stood up and took daggers in their hands. An intense darkness fell upon them, and they set about killing one another. Then the darkness lifted away from them, and they had left seventy thousand slain. All those who had been killed had done their penance, and all those who survived had done their penance. [936]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

When Moses returned to his people, he said: 'My people, did your Lord not promise a fair promise to you? 'Did the time of the covenant seem too long to you, or did you desire that anger should alight on you from your Lord, so that you failed in your tryst with me?' 'We have not failed in our tryst with you,' they said, 'of our volition; but we were loaded with fardels even the ornaments of the people, and we cast them', as the Samaritan also threw them, into the fire.' » (20: 86-7) Then Moses flung down the Tablets and took his brother by his head to pull him towards him. 'Aaron' said: 'Son of my mother, take me not by the beard, or the head! I was fearful that you would say: "You have divided the Children of Israel, but you have not observed my word." ' » (20: 94) Then he left Aaron and turned to the Samaritan and said: 'What was your business, Samaritan?' 'I beheld what they did not behold,' he said, 'and I seized a handful (of dust) from the Messenger's track, and cast it into the thing. So my soul prompted me.' 'Depart!' said Moses. 'It shall be yours all this life to cry "Untouchable!" And thereafter a tryst awaits you which you cannot fail to keep. Behold your God, to whom all the day you were cleaving! We will surely burn it' and scatter its ashes into the sea. . . . » (20: 95-6) Then he took it and slit it.

Then he filed it down (*haraqā-hu bi-'l-mibrad*) and scattered it in the sea, and wherever the sea flowed that day there was something of it in it. Then Moses said to them: 'Drink from it!' So they drank, and gold exuded on the moustache¹ of those who drank it who had loved it. And that is when He says: «and they were made to drink the Calf in their hearts for their unbelief» (2: 93). When the Children of Israel were dumbfounded on Moses' arrival, and saw that they had gone astray, they said: «If our Lord has not mercy on us, and forgives us not, surely we shall be of the lost.» (7: 149) But God refused to accept the repentance of the Children of Israel, except on the condition, to which they were averse, that He should fight them when they worshipped the Calf. So Moses said to them: «My people, you have done wrong against yourselves by taking the Calf; now turn to your Creator and slay one another.» (...) So they drew up in two rows and fought each other with swords.

Those who had worshipped it and those who had not worshipped it fought each other with swords, and those of the two groups who were killed became martyrs, until there was a great killing so that they were about to be annihilated. There were seventy thousand of them killed, until Moses and Aaron called out: 'Our Lord, the Children of Israel have perished! Our Lord, 'spare' the rest, 'spare' the rest!' Then He ordered them to lay down their arms, and He turned to them. Those who were killed became martyrs, and those who remained were atoned before Him. This is 'implied in' His words: «and He turned to you; truly He turns, and is All-compassionate.» [937]

(..)

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

When Moses had returned to his people, and had filed down (*haraqā*) the Calf and scattered it in the sea, and had gone out to his Lord with those of his people he had chosen, and the thunderbolt had taken them,³ and then they had been revived, Moses asked his Lord for forgiveness for the Children of Israel for having worshipped the Calf. Then He said: 'No! Not unless they slay each other.' (...) It has reached us that they said to Moses: 'We accept the command of God with patience.' So Moses ordered those who had not worshipped the Calf to kill those who had worshipped it. So they sat down in the courtyards, and the people unsheathed

their swords against them and set about killing them. And Moses wept, and the women and children gathered around him to seek forgiveness for them. So He turned to them and forgave them. And Moses ordered that the sword should be lifted from them.

[944]

(...)

¶ «That will be better for you before your Creator»: Your repentance by killing each other, and your obedience to your Lord, will be better for you before your Lord, because you will thereby be saved from the punishment of God in the Hereafter for your sins, and you will thereby merit reward from Him.

As for His words «'a'nd He turned to you», i.e., for your killing each other as He commanded you, this is 'a case of' ellipsis where the ostensive text can do without what is omitted, for the meaning of the passage is: Now turn to your Creator and slay one another; that will be better for you before your Creator; so you turned, and He turned to you. And the mention of His words 'so you turned' is omitted, since there is a clear indication in His words «'a'nd He turned to you» of the need for 'so you turned'.

(...)

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 37–8, p. 265.

² «'... and He will turn to you ...'» is another interpretation of this passage, different to the one Ṭabātī prefers.

³ See *Exeg.* 2: 55, p. 332.

2: 55

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَمُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً
فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

*wa-idh qultum yā-Mūsā lan nu'mina la-ka ḥattā nara 'llāha jahratan
fa-akhadhat-kumu 'l-ṣā'iqatu wa-antum tanẓurūna*

And when you said: 'Moses, we will not believe you till we see God openly'; and the thunderbolt took you while you were beholding.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH QULTUM YĀ-MŪSĀ
LAN NU'MINA LA-KA ḤATTĀ NARA 'LLĀHA JAHRATAN*

¶ AND remember also when you said: 'Moses, we will not attest your truthfulness nor acknowledge what you have brought us until we have seen God openly with our own eyes [see ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 948; and ⇒ Qatāda, 950], with the screen between us and Him lifted, and the covering separating us and Him removed, so that we may look on Him with our eyes as the well is seen without turbidity (*tujharu*).'

This is when the water in 'a well' is clouded by mud, and what is concealed becomes 'gradually' clarified until the water becomes visible and pure; one then says: 'I saw (*jahartu*) the well without turbidity.' Because of this one says 'So-and-so made something public (*jāhara bi-'l-amr*)', when he exposed it to view and declared it openly [see ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 947].‡

(...)

Thus He reminded them of the disputatiousness of their forefathers, and of the insincerity of their forebears towards their prophets, despite the many times they observed the signs and warnings of God, by the least of which their hearts were appeased, and through which their souls gained confidence. That is to say that, despite the succession of proofs for them and the abundance of blessings from God towards them, one time they asked their prophet to give them a god other than Allāh, one time they worshipped the Calf to the exclusion of God, and one time they said: 'We will not attest your truthfulness till we see God

openly.' And another time they said to him, when they were called upon to fight: «'Go forth, you and your Lord, and do battle; we will be sitting here.'» (5: 24) And one time they were told: «'Say: "Unburdening", and enter in at the gate, prostrating, and We will forgive you your transgressions'» (7: 161), and they said: 'Wheat in a barleycorn!', and entered in at the gate on their buttocks.¹ And so on with the deeds by which they harmed their prophet, which would take much space to enumerate.

Thus our Lord notified the Jews of the Children of Israel who were around the abode of exile of the Messenger of God¹, Medina¹, whom He addressed with these verses, that, in their giving Muḥammad the lie, denying his prophethood, refraining from acknowledging him and what he brought, despite their knowledge of him and their acquaintance with the truth of his affair, they were only doing what their forebears and forefathers, whose stories He had set forth for them in detail, had been doing when they renounced their religion time after time, and pounced upon their prophet, Moses, again and again, despite the greatness of God's trial for them and the abundance of his blessings towards them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-AKHADHAT-KUMU 'L-ṢĀ'IQATU
WA-ANTUM TANẒURŪNA*

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Qatāda:

'It means' they died. [951]

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas¹:

'It means' they heard a sound and were thunderstruck (*ṣa'iqū*), meaning 'they died'. [952]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Al-Suddī:

The thunderbolt was a fire. [953]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

A convulsion took hold of them, and this is the 'thunderbolt', then they all died. [954]

TABARĪ'S COMMENTARY: The original meaning of *ṣā'iqa* is anything terrifying which 'someone' sees or witnesses, or which happens to him—be it a sound or a fire or an earthquake or a convulsion—, as a result of the terror and awesomeness of which he perishes and is destroyed, or he loses his mind and his understanding is inundated, or he loses some organ. Among the things which indicate that someone can be 'thunderstruck' (*maṣ'ūq*) and still be alive and not dead are His words: «and Moses fell down thunderstruck» (7: 143), meaning 'in a swoon'.† It is clear that when Moses swooned and was thunderstruck he did not die, because God said about him that when he recovered he said: «I repent before You.» (7: 143) . . .

By «while you were beholding» He means: While you were beholding the thunderbolt which fell upon you. He means: The thunderbolt took you visibly and openly while you were looking at it.

¹ See Exeg. 2: 59, pp. 339–40.

2: 56

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

thumma ba'athnā-kum min ba'di mawti-kum la'alla-kum tashkurūna

Then We revived you after you were dead, so that you might be thankful.

[T]: FIRST OPINION: By his words «'Then We revived (*ba'atha*) you» He means 'then We brought you back to life'. The original meaning of *ba'th* is 'to rouse something from its place', and because of this one says: 'So-and-so stirred (*ba'atha*) his riding camel', and when he roused it for the journey from where it was kneeling.† . . . And because of this the Day of the Resurrection is called 'the Day of the Awakening (*yaum al-ba'th*)' because it is the day when the people will be roused from their graves to the Station of the Reckoning.

By «after you were dead» He means 'after you died from the thunderbolt which destroyed you'.

«As for» His words «so that you might be thankful», He means: We did this to you so that you might thank Me for My favour towards you which I bestowed by bringing you to life, and thus preserving you, so

that you might turn from the greatness of your sin to repentance, after I had inflicted My punishment on you by the thunderbolt which I sent down to you, and causing you to die for the greatness of your offence between you and your Lord.

This is based on the interpretation of those who interpreted «*thumma ba'athnā-kum*» as 'then We revived you'.

SECOND OPINION: Others said [see ⇒Al-Suddī, 955, and also, below, 958]: 'The meaning of «*thumma ba'athnā-kum*» is "then We sent you as prophets".'

TABARĪ'S COMMENT: The interpretation of the passage according to al-Suddī's interpretation is: Then the thunderbolt took you; then We revived you after you were dead while you beheld our reviving you after you were dead; then We revived you as prophets so that you might be thankful. Al-Suddī claims that this is 'a case of' hysteron proteron. [See ⇒Al-Suddī, 956, and below, 958.]

But the ostensive reading indicates the opposite of this interpretation, and, moreover, the consensus of the interpreters is for declaring it mistaken. According to the interpretation which we have related from al-Suddī, the meaning of His words «so that you might be thankful» would have to be 'so that you might be thankful for My making prophets out of you'.

The reason for them saying to Moses what God stated that they said to him, viz., «'We will not believe you till we see God openly», is:

⇒Muḥammad b. Ishāq:

When Moses had returned to his people, had seen the worship of the Calf in which they were engaged, had said to his brother and the Samaritan what he said, and had felled down the Calf and scattered it in the sea, he chose seventy men from them, the most noble, and said: 'Hurry to God and repent before Him for what you have done, and ask Him to forgive those of your people you have left behind. Fast and purify yourselves and your garments.' Then he went out with them to Mount Sinai for a meeting which his Lord had appointed for him; and he did not use to come to Him except with His permission and knowledge. And the seventy said to him—in what has been mentioned to me—when they had done what he had ordered them to do and had gone out to meet his Lord: 'Moses, beseech your Lord for us that we might hear the speech of our Lord.' He said: 'I will.' When Moses came near to

the mountain, a pillar of cloud fell on it so that the whole mountain was enveloped. So Moses went near and entered into it, and said to his people: 'Come close!'

When Moses used to speak with his Lord, there would appear on his forehead a brilliant light which no human being could gaze on; so a veil was set up behind him, and the people came near till, when they entered the cloud, they fell down in prostration. Then they heard Him speaking with Moses, commanding him and forbidding him: 'Do this' and 'Don't do that.' When He had finished commanding him, the cloud was lifted from Moses. Then he turned to them, and they said to him: «'We will not believe till we see God openly.'»

Then the trembling took them—this was the thunderbolt—'and their spirits were suddenly given up,' and they died all together. Moses began to implore his Lord, to call upon Him, and to adjure Him, saying: 'My Lord, if You had willed, You would have destroyed them before, and me, when they were insolent. Will You destroy the Children of Israel behind me for what the insolent among us were doing?'—He meant: 'This will surely be their destruction.'—'I have chosen seventy men from them, the most noble, and I shall return to 'the Children of Israel' with not a single one of them with me. After that, how will they 'be able to' believe in me, and what will they entrust to me? We have repented unto You.'¹ And Moses went on imploring his Lord, beseeching Him, and begging Him, until He returned their spirits to them. Then he asked Him to forgive the Children of Israel for having worshipped the Calf, but He said: 'No, not unless they kill one another!' [957]

⇒Al-Suddī:

When the Children of Israel had repented of their worship of the Calf, and God had forgiven them as a result of 'their' killing each other as He had ordered them to do, God commanded Moses to come to Him in the company of some people of the Children of Israel who would apologize to Him for having worshipped the Calf, and He appointed a time for them. So Moses chose seventy men from his people of his own choosing, then he went with them in order that they might apologize.

When they reached that place, they said: «'We will not believe you till we have seen God openly'; you have spoken with him, so

show Him to us.' Then the thunderbolt took them and they died. Then Moses began to wail and to call upon his Lord, saying: 'My Lord, what shall I say to the Children of Israel when I come to them, when You have destroyed the choice among them? «My Lord, had You willed You would have destroyed them before, and me. Will You destroy us for what the insolent among us have done?»' (7: 155) Then God inspired Moses with 'these words': 'These seventy are from those who took to themselves the Calf.' And this was when Moses said: «'This is only Your trial, whereby You lead astray whom You will, and guide whom You will. . . . 'We have repented unto You.'» (7: 155-6) These are His words: «And when you said: 'Moses, we will not believe you till we see God openly'; and the thunderbolt took you».

Then God brought them back to life, and man by man they stood up and were alive, some of them seeing how others were brought to life; and they said: 'Moses, you call upon God, and He never fails to give you what you ask of Him. So call upon Him to make us prophets.' So he called upon God, and He made them prophets. These are His words: «Then We revived you after you were dead»; however, one 'part of this' utterance has been put first, and another has been put afterwards.² [958]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

When Moses had returned from his Lord with the Tablets, the Torah having been written on them, had found them worshipping the Calf, and had ordered them to kill each other, and when they had done this and God had forgiven them, he said to them: 'On these Tablets is God's scripture; on them is His command which He commands you to do, and His prohibition which He forbids you to do.' They said: 'Who will take it at your word? No, by God, not until we see God openly, 'not' until God becomes visible to us, and says: "This is My scripture: take it." Why does He not speak to us as He spoke to You, Moses, and say: "This is My scripture: take it"?' (...) Then there was an outburst of wrath from God, and a thunderbolt came to them after they had repented, and they were thunderstruck and died all together. (...) Then God brought them back to life after they had died. (...) «Then We revived you after you were dead, so that you might be thankful.»

Then Moses said to them: 'Take God's scripture!', and they said: 'No!' He said: 'Whatever has happened to you?' They said:

'What has happened is that we died and then came back to life.' He said: 'Take God's scripture!', and they said 'No!' So God sent angels, and they upturned the mountain over them. [959]

⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, concerning «and the thunderbolt took you»:

They were the seventy whom Moses chose and who went forth with him. (...) They heard speech, and said: «'We will not believe in you till we see God openly.'» (...) Then they heard a voice and were thunderstruck—meaning 'they died'—and these are His words: «Then We revived you after you were dead», and they were revived after they had been dead, because this death of theirs had been a punishment for them, and they were revived for the rest of their appointed times. [961; see also ⇒Qatāda, 960]

This is what has been transmitted concerning the reason for their saying to Moses: «'We will not believe in you till we see God openly.'» But we have no Tradition 'from the Prophet or a Companion confirming¹ the correctness of anything said by any of those whose opinion about their saying this to Moses we have quoted by which an incontrovertible proof could be established, although it is conceivable that this was part of what the 'Children of Israel' said. Since there is no such Tradition establishing a proof, the proper thing to say about this is: God stated that Moses' people said to him: «'Moses, we will not believe in you till we see God openly'», as He stated. God said this about them to those to whom these verses are addressed as a reproof to them for their unbelief in Muḥammad, and His proof was set up against those against whom He set His argument. But no one whom it reaches has any need to know the reason which motivated them to say this. . . .

¹ For this passage refer to 7: 155–6.

² See the second opinion in the exegesis of this verse.

2: 57

وَضَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلْوَى
كُلُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا
أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

wa-ḡallalnā 'alay-kumu 'l-ghamāma wa-anzalnā 'alay-kumu 'l-manna wa-'l-salwā kulū min ṭaiyibāti mā razaqnā-kum wa-mā ḡalamū-nā wa-lākin kānū anfusa-hum yaḡlimūna

And We spread the overcast to shade you, and We sent down manna and quails upon you: 'Eat of the good things with which We have provided you.' And they worked no wrong upon Us, but themselves they wronged.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ḢALLALNĀ
'ALAY-KUMU 'L-GHAMĀMA

«AND We spread the overcast (*ghamām*) to shade you» is connected to His words «Then We revived you after you were dead», and thus:

¶ Then We revived you after you were dead and spread the overcast to shade you—and He enumerates for them the other blessings He bestowed upon them—so that you might be thankful.

Ghamām is the plural of *ghamāma*, just as *saḥāb* is the plural of *saḥāba* (=cloud). *Ghamām* is that which overcasts (*ghamma*) the sky and covers it with clouds and dark dust and other things which veil it from the eyes of gazers. The Arabs call everything which is obscured *maghmūm*.

It has been said that the *ghamām* which God spread as shade for the Children of Israel was not cloud.

⇒Mujāhid:

«*Ghamām*»¹ is not clouds. It is the veil in which God comes on the Day of the Resurrection; it was only 'visible' to them. [963; see also 962]

(..)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«*Ghamām*»¹ is a veil cooler than this 'ordinary cloud' and more pleasant. It is what God comes in on the Day of the Resurrection, in His words: «in the cloud-shadows (*fi ḡulalīn minā 'l-ghamāmi*) » (2: 210). It is what the angels came in on the day of 'the battle of' Badr,¹ (...) and it was with them in the wilderness. [965]

If the meaning of «*ghamām*» is as we have described . . . , then . . . what God described as *ghamām* is no more likely to have been a cloud than 'it is to have been' something else which covered the face of the sky. (...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ANZALNĀ
'ALAY-KUMU 'L-MANNA

[T]: «MANNA»: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

Manna is resin. [966, 967]

⇒ Qatāda:

The manna which was sent to them was like ice. [968]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that it was a drink:

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

Manna was a drink like honey which descended on them, and they mixed it with water and then drank it. [969]

THIRD OPINION: Others said that manna was honey:

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

Manna is honey that was sent down to them from the sky. [970]

⇒ 'Āmir:

This honey of yours is one of the seventy parts of manna. [971]

FOURTH OPINION: And others said that manna is thin bread:

⇒ 'Abd al-Ṣamad:

I heard Wahb, who was asked 'What is manna?', say: 'It is bread of the flat kind, like 'bread of' sorghum or white flour. [972; see 995 below]

FIFTH OPINION: And others said that manna was ginger (*zanjabīl*):

⇒ Al-Suddī:

Manna used to fall 'as dew' upon the ginger plant. [973]

SIXTH OPINION: Others said that manna is 'a substance' which falls 'as dew' on trees 'and' which people eat:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Manna was sent down onto their trees, and they fed on it and ate of it what they wanted. [974; see also ⇒ 'Ammār, 975, 977]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Manna is what falls from the sky onto trees and which people eat. [976]

SEVENTH OPINION: It is also said that manna is *turanjabīn*.²

EIGHTH OPINION: And some said that manna is what falls 'as dew' on panic grass (*thumām*) and 'the grass' *Asclepias gigantea* ('*ushar*'), which is sweet like honey.

NINTH OPINION: Traditions from the Messenger of God make it clear that he said:

Truffles (*kam'a*) come from manna, and the juice of them is a remedy for the eyes.³ [978]

TENTH OPINION: And some said that manna is a sweet drink which used to be cooked and drunk.

ELEVENTH OPINION: Umaiya b. Abi 'l-Ṣalt, in 'one' of his poem's¹, takes it to be honey. . . . He takes the manna which was sent down to them to be dripping honey ('*asal nāṭif*').⁴

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'L-SALWĀ

Salwā is the name of a bird which is similar to the quail (*sumānā*); the singular and the plural is the same word, just as *sumānā* is a word whose singular and plural is the same. It has been said that the singular of *salwā* is *salwāt*.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, ⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, and ⇒ A group of Companions of the Prophet:

The *salwā* is a bird similar to the quail. [979]

⇒Al-Suddī:

The *salwā* was a bird bigger than the quail. [980]

⇒Qatāda:

The *salwā* is a bird which the south wind swept into a flock for them. [981]

(..)

⇒ʿAbd al-Šamad:

I heard Wahb, who was asked 'What is the *salwā*?', say: 'It is a plump bird like a pigeon.' [984; see 995 below]

(..)

⇒ʿĀmir:

The *salwā* is a quail. [987, 989. See also ⇒Ibn ʿAbbās, 988; and ⇒Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 990]

QUESTION: Why did God spread the overcast as shade and send manna and quails for these people?

REPLY: The scholars differed about this, and we shall quote what we have from them.

⇒Al-Suddī:

When God had forgiven the people of Moses, and had brought to life the seventy whom Moses had chosen, after He had made them die, God commanded them to proceed to Jericho, which is the region of Jerusalem. So they proceeded there, until, when they were near them, Moses sent forth twelve leaders; and God has narrated what happened to them, and to the tyrants, and to the people of Moses, in His Book.

Then Moses' people said to him: «'Go forth, you and your Lord, and do battle; we will be sitting here.'» Then Moses became angry and prayed against them, saying: «'O my Lord, I rule no one except myself and my brother. So divide between us and the people of the ungodly.'» But this was precipitate on the part of Moses, and God said: «'Then it shall be forbidden them for 40 years, while they are wandering in the earth'. Then, when wandering in the wilderness was imposed on them, Moses was

struck with remorse, and 'those of' his people who were with him and obedient to him came to him and said: 'What have you done with us?' And when he was struck with remorse, God inspired in him «'Do not grieve for the people of the ungodly'» (5: 24-6), i.e., 'Do not be sorrowful for the people whom you call ungodly.' So he was not sorrowful.

Then they said: 'Moses, how are we to get water here? Where is 'our' food?' So God sent down to them manna—and it fell 'as dew' on the plant of *turanjabīn**—and *salwā*—and this is a bird like a quail. And one of them would come and observe the bird, and if it was plump he would kill it, and if not he would let it go and when it became plump he would come 'back' to it. Then they said: 'This is food, but where is 'our' drink?' And Moses was commanded, and he struck the rock with his staff, and twelve springs gushed forth from it; and each tribe drank from a spring. Then they said: 'This is food and drink, but where is 'our' shade?' So the overcast was spread over them as shade. Then they said: 'This is the shade, but where are 'our' clothes?' So their garments grew longer with them just as children grow, and none of their garments wore out.

And these are His words: «And We spread the overcast to shade you, and We sent down manna and quails upon you»; and His words: «And when Moses sought water for his people, so We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff'; and there gushed forth from it twelve fountains; all the people knew their drinking-place.» (2: 60) [991, 996. See also ⇒Ibn Ishāq, 992]

⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas:

He spread the overcast to shade them in the wilderness, it being between five or six parasangs in extent. When it was morning they would set out early, and in the evening they would be in the place from which they had set out. Thus it was with them for 40 years. (...) In that time manna and quails were sent down to them, and their garments did not become worn. And there was a rock from Mount 'Sinai' with them which they carried with them, and whenever they stopped, Moses struck it with his staff and twelve springs gushed forth from it. [993, 994]

* Sh. & Sh., II, 98, l. 8: *turanjabīn*.

⇒'Abd al-Šamad:

I heard Wahb ṭb. Munabbih¹ say: 'When God forbade the Children of Israel to enter Palestine for 40 years, ṭduring which¹ they wandered in the land, they complained to Moses, saying: "What shall we eat?" And he said: "God will bring you what you will eat." They said: "Where will we ṭget it¹ from? Unless He causes bread to rain down on us!" He said: "God will send down baked bread to you." Then manna was sent down to them.'

Wahb was asked: 'What is manna?' He said: 'Bread of the flat kind, like ṭbread of¹ sorghum or white flour.'

'They said: "What shall we flavour it with? Is there any alternative to meat for us?" He said: "God will bring it for you." They said: "Where will we ṭget it¹ from? Unless the wind brings it for us!" He said: "The wind will bring it for you." And the wind brought them *salwā*.'

Wahb was asked: 'What is the *salwā*?' He said: 'It is a plump bird like the pigeon. It came to them and they partook of it from one sabbath to another.'

'They said: "What shall we wear?" He said: "Not a single one of you will wear out his garment for 40 years." They said: "What shall we wear on our feet?" He said: "Not a single one of you will break the thong of his sandle for 40 years." They said: "And if children are born among us, what shall we clothe them in?" He said: "The garment of the child will grow up with him." They said: "Where will we get water from?" He said: "God will bring it to you." They said: "Where from? Unless it comes forth for us from the rock!" Then God commanded Moses to strike the rock with his staff. They said: "How can we see! Darkness covers us!" So He struck a column of light for them in the middle of their gathering which lit up all their assembly. They said: "How shall we protect ourselves from the sun, if it shines fiercely down on us?" He said: "God will spread the overcast to shade you." [995]

⇒Ibn Juraij:

'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās said: 'In the wilderness, clothes which did not become worn or dirty were created for them.'

If a man took more manna and quails than he needed to eat in one day, it went bad, unless they took on Friday food for Saturday, when it did not go bad. [997]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KULŪ MIN ṬAIYIBĀTI*
MĀ RAZAQNĀ-KUM

This is one ṭof those cases¹ where the ostensive wording is able to indicate what has been omitted from it. That is to say, the interpretation of the verse is: And We spread the overcast to shade you, and We sent down manna and quails upon you, and We said to you: 'Eat of the good things with which We have provided you.' And mention of His words 'and We said to you' has been omitted, because of what we have explained about the ostensive wording indicating it in the speech.

§ Of two possible interpretations of «*ṭaiyibāt*»—either 'enjoyable things' or 'licit things'—Ṭabarī prefers the first, since the word describes the pleasant means of living which God gave the Children of Israel.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MĀ ṬALAMŪ-NĀ*
WA-LĀKIN KĀNŪ ANFUSA-HUM YAṬLIMŪNA

This is also one ṭof the cases¹ where the ostensive wording is able to indicate what has been omitted from it. For the meaning of the passage is: 'Eat of the good things with which We have provided you'; but they went against Our command to them and disobeyed their Lord, and against Our Messenger to them, but «they worked no wrong against Us». Thus, through the ostensive wording, He dispensed with what has been omitted. . . .

¶ «And they worked no wrong upon Us»: They did not put this deed of theirs and their disobedience to Us where it would harm Us or diminish Us, but instead they placed it amongst themselves where it harmed and diminished them.⁵ [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 998.]

(...)

Thus no one's disobedience harms our Lord, no one's injustice encroaches upon His reserves, nor does anyone's obedience benefit Him, nor anyone's justice increase His Kingdom. The unjust person wrongs but himself, the disobedient diminishes his own portion, the obedient benefits his own self, and the just gains his own portion.

¹ See 8: 9.

² A manna-like excrescence of the camel-thorn (*Alhagi maurorum*), which was thought by Muslim botanists to fall as dew onto this plant.

³ Ṭabarī gives this Tradition without any chain of transmission, but it is an attested Tradition

which many narrators transmitted from the Prophet (see Sh. & Sh. II, 94, n.2).

⁴ Umaiya b. Abi 'l-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī (d. 8 or 9/629-31), an Arabic poet who has much panegyric and religious poetry attributed to him.

⁵ For his explanation of the basic meaning of *ẓulm* (=putting something in the wrong place), Tabarī refers back to *Exeg.* 2: 35, p. 249.

2: 58

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا أَدْخُلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ
رَعْدًا وَأَدْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ
خَطِيئَتَكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

*wa-idh qulna 'dkhulū hādhihi 'l-qaryata fa-kulū min-hā ḥaithu
shi'tum raghadan wa-'dkhulu 'l-bāba sujjadan wa-qūlū ḥiṭṭatun
naghfir la-kum khaṭāyā-kum wa-sa-nazīdu 'l-muḥsinīna*

And when We said: 'Enter this township, and eat easefully of it wherever you will, and enter in at the gate prostrating, and say: "It is an¹ unburdening": We will forgive you your transgressions, and increase the good-doers.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDH QULNA 'DKHULŪ HĀDHIHI 'L-QARYATA

The «township» which God commanded them to enter and to eat easefully of wherever they willed, is, according to what has been quoted to us, Jerusalem (Bait al-Maqdis). [⇒Qatāda, 999; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1000; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1001.]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

This is Jericho, which is nearby Jerusalem. [1002]

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-KULŪ MIN-HĀ ḤAITHU SHI'TUM RAGHADAN

¶ Eat 'your' sustenance, healthily and extensively, from this township, wherever you wish, without account.

We have explained the meaning of *raghd* (=ease) previously in our

book, and have there quoted the opinions of the interpreters about it.¹

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'DKHULU 'L-BĀBA SUJJADAN

As for «the gate» which they were commanded to enter at, it is said 'that' it is the Gate of Unburdening (Bāb al-Ḥiṭṭa) in Jerusalem.

⇒Mujāhid:

'It is' the Gate of Unburdening, part of the Gate of 'Ilyā' in Jerusalem. [1003, 1004]

(..)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«'Enter at the gate prostrating»; it was one of the gates of Jerusalem which was called the Gate of Unburdening. (...) «Prostrating» means 'bowing to the ground (*rukka'*, sing. *rāki'*)'. [1006]

(..)

The basic meaning of *sujūd* (=prostration) is 'to bow' (*inḥinā'*) to whoever is prostrated to and thereby glorified. Whoever bows to something to glorify it is 'called' a *sājid*.[‡] This is why Ibn 'Abbās interpreted «*sujjadan*» as 'bowing to the ground', although someone who prostrates bows more intensely than 'does a *rāki'*'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-QŪLŪ ḤIṬṬATUN

The interpretation of His expression «*ḥiṭṭa*» 'is that it is a noun of the form' *fi'la* from 'the verb *ḥaṭṭa*' as in the expression 'God unburdened (*ḥaṭṭa*) you of your transgressions'....

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said the same as we have said about it:

⇒Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatāda:

It means: 'Unburden us of our transgressions.' [1009]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

«'A'nd say: "It is an¹ unburdening"», by which God unburdens you of your sin and transgression. [1010. See also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1011; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1013; ⇒Ibn Juraij, 1014]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Ḥiṭṭa 'means' 'forgiveness'. [1012]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that it meant: 'Say: "There is no god but Allāh"' [⇒ 'Ikrima, 1015], as if they interpreted it thus: 'Say what unburdens you of your transgressions, which is the statement "There is no god but Allāh."'

THIRD OPINION: Others gave the same meaning as 'Ikrima, except that they believed that what they were commanded to say was to ask for God's forgiveness. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1016.]

FOURTH OPINION: Others said the same as 'Ikrima, except that what they were commanded to say was 'This command is true as you were told.' [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1017]

[L]: WHY « *ḤIṬṬA* » IS IN THE NOMINATIVE: FIRST OPINION: Some Baṣran grammarians said 'that' *ḥiṭṭa* is in the nominative with the meaning: Say: 'Let there be an unburdening of our sins from You.' . . .

SECOND OPINION: Other 'Baṣran grammarians' said it was a word which God commanded them to say in the nominative, and He imposed upon them to say it thus.

THIRD OPINION: Some Kūfan grammarians said 'that' *ḥiṭṭa* is in the nominative due to an ellipsis of 'the pronoun' 'this', as if He had said: Say 'This is' an unburdening'.

FOURTH OPINION: Other 'Kūfan grammarians' said 'that' it is nominative with an ellipsis, with the sense of the predicate, as if He had said: Say that which is an unburdening, and 'unburdening' is then the predicate of 'that which'.

TABARĪ'S OPINION: That which, in my view, is nearest to being correct concerning this, and closest to the ostensive meaning of the Book is that *ḥiṭṭa* is in the nominative with the intended 'meaning' of an omitted predicate which the ostensive reading points to, which is: 'Our entering at the gate prostrating is an unburdening.' This 'single' word saves repeating what the ostensive meaning of the Revelation indicates, which is His words 'Our entering at the gate prostrating', as when He said: «And when a certain nation of them said: 'Why do you

admonish a people God is about to destroy or to chastise with a terrible chastisement?' They said: 'An excuse to your Lord' » (7: 164), meaning: 'Our admonishing them is an excuse to your Lord.' . . . This opinion corresponds to the interpretation of al-Rabī' b. Anas, Ibn Juraij, and Ibn Zaid, which we have quoted above.

According to the interpretation which 'Ikrima gives 'in the second opinion above', it would be necessary to read *ḥiṭṭa* in the accusative, because if the people had been commanded to say 'There is no god but Allāh' or 'We ask God's forgiveness', they would have been told to say these words, and 'Say' would then have been transitive with *ḥiṭṭa* as its object, because *ḥiṭṭa*, according to the opinion of 'Ikrima, was the words 'There is no god but Allāh'. . . . However, in the consensus to recite *ḥiṭṭa* in the nominative is a clear demonstration of the contrary of what 'Ikrima said Similarly, according to the interpretation we have narrated from al-Ḥasan and Qatāda . . . , it would be necessary to read *ḥiṭṭa* in the accusative, because the Arabs are used to putting the verbal noun into the accusative when they use it in place of a verb and omit the verb.†²

THE INTERPRETATION OF *NAḠḤFIR LA-KUM*

¶ We will cover your transgressions with Mercy, and conceal what you have done, and We will not shame you with punishment for them.

The basic meaning of *ghaḥḥir* (=forgiveness) is 'covering' and 'concealing'; whatever conceals something is its *ghāḥir*. Thus the iron helmet which is put on the head as protection is called a *mighḥar*, because it covers the head and protects it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KHAṬĀYĀ-KUM*

§ There are two forms of the Arabic word for 'transgression', *khaṭī'a* and *khaṭīya*, the first with a *hamza* (', the glottal stop) and the second without; Ṭabarī explains that *khaṭāyā* is the plural of *khaṭīya*, and is used because the singular without the *hamza* is more common than the singular with it. He points out that the correct plural of *khaṭī'a* would be *khaṭā'ī* or *khaṭī'āt*. The verb *khaṭī'a* is used when someone deviates from the way of truth.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-SA-NAZĪDU 'L-MUḤSINĪNA*

The interpretation of this is what has been narrated to us from Ibn 'Abbās:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«[A]nd increase the good-doers»: whosoever among you has done good will have his good deeds increased, and We will forgive the transgressions of whosoever among you has transgressed. [1018]

* * *

¶ 2: 58 in toto: And 'remember' when We said to you 'Enter this township, with every good thing in it lawful for you and extended to you without account. Enter at the gate prostrating, and say: "This prostration of ours before God is an unburdening of our sins from our Lord . . .". We will cover the sins of the sinners among you and conceal what they have done, and unburden them of their heavy loads; and We will increase the good-doers among you with good deeds over and above the previous good We did for him.'

'In the next verse,¹ God speaks about their tremendous foolishness, their disobedience towards their Lord, their rebellion against their prophets, their derision of the Messengers, despite God's great blessings towards them and the wonders of His signs and warnings which He showed them. He thereby warns their descendants, who were addressed by these verses, instructing them that if they transgressed in their giving Muḥammad the lie and denying his prophethood, despite God's great beneficence towards them in sending him to them and the wonders of the proofs that He manifested through him among them, they would be like their ancestors whose nature He described, and whose story He narrated to us in these verses. . . .

¹ See Exeg. 2: 35, p. 246.

² Ṭabarī also gives «ma'ādha 'llāhi» as an example of this kind of grammatical construction. The word «ma'ādha» (= refuge) is a verbal noun in the accusative, and the whole phrase, according to him, stands for 'We seek refuge in God.'

2: 59

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ

fa-baddala 'lladhīna ḡalamū qawlan ghaira 'lladhī qīla la-hum fa-anzalnā 'ala 'lladhīna ḡalamū rijzan mina 'l-samā'i bi-mā kānū yafsuqūna

Then the evil-doers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them; so We sent down upon the evil-doers an affliction out of heaven for their ungodliness.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-BADDALA 'LLADHĪNA ḡALAMŪ
QAWLAN GHAIIRA 'LLADHĪ QĪLA LA-HUM

(...)

⇒ Abū Huraira:

The Messenger of God said: 'God said to the Children of Israel: «"[E]nter in at the gate, prostrating, and say: 'Unburdening (ḥiṭṭatun)'; We will forgive you your transgressions."» But they substituted 'another behaviour for this', and entered in at the gate crawling on their buttocks, saying: "A grain in a barleycorn (ḥabbatun ft sha'irātun)."' [1019; and ⇒ Abū Huraira and Ibn 'Abbās, 1020, 1021; ⇒ Qatāda and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1026, who have 'crawling on their hips'. See also ⇒ Abū Huraira, 1022; ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1034, 1035]

⇒ 'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd¹:

«"[E]nter in at the gate, prostrating, and say: "Unburdening (ḥiṭṭatun)"; they said 'Red wheat (ḥinṭa ḥamrā)' in which is barleycorn'. Then God sent down: «Then the evildoers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them». [1023]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'[E]nter in at the gate, prostrating'», bowing to the ground at a small gate. But they began to go in by their buttocks, and to say: 'Wheat (ḥinṭa)'. That is 'the meaning of' His words «Then the

evil-doers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them». [1024; and 1025]

⇒Mujāhid:

Moses commanded his people to enter the place of prostration (*masjid*) and to say 'Unburdening', and the gate was made lower for them so that they would lower their heads, but they did not prostrate and entered on their buttocks as far as the mountain—this was the mountain to which its Lord had manifested himself—and said: 'Wheat'. This was the substitution 'about' which God said: «Then the evil-doers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them». [1028; see also 1027]

⇒Ibn Mas'ūd:

They said: '*h-ṭ-ī s-m-q-ā yā 'z-b-t h-z-bā*', 'which means' . . . 'A pierced grain of red wheat in which is a black barleycorn'. That is 'the meaning of' His words: «Then the evil-doers substituted a saying other than that which had been said to them». [1029]

(. .)

⇒Ibn Zaid:

«'A¹nd enter in at the gate, prostrating, and say: "It is an¹ unburdening"» by which God will unburden you of your sins and transgressions.' (...) But they ridiculed him—i.e., Moses—and said: 'Moses plays around with us just as he likes. *Ḥiṭṭatun*, *ḥiṭṭatun*! What is *ḥiṭṭatun*?' And they said to each other: 'Wheat (*ḥinṭa*).' [1033]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-ANZALNĀ 'ALA 'LLADHĪNA
ẒALAMŪ RIJZAN MINA 'L-SAMĀ'I

¶ «'S¹o We sent down upon the evil-doers»—upon those who did what they should not have done when they substituted another saying for the saying which God had commanded them to say, and when they disobeyed Him concerning what He had commanded them to do and perpetrated what He had forbidden them to do—«an affliction out of heaven for their ungodliness.»

Rijz in the Arabic language is 'torment', and it is different from

rujz.¹ That is to say that *rijz* is 'pustules', from which comes the saying of the prophet concerning plague . . . :

⇒Usāma b. Zaid:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'This pain'—or 'sickness'—is pustules (*rijz*) with which some of the nations before you were afflicted.' [1036]

⇒'Āmir b. Sa'd:

I witnessed Usāma b. Zaid say before Sa'd b. Mālik: 'The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: "Plague is 'pustules' which were inflicted on those who were before you"—or "on the Children of Israel."' [1037]

As an example for what we have said about the interpretation of this, 'here' is what the interpreters said:

⇒Qatāda:

'«*Rijz*» means' 'torment'. [1038]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

Rijz is 'wrath'. [1039]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

When the Children of Israel were told: «'E¹nter in at the gate, prostrating, and say: "Unburdening"», and the evil-doers among them substituted a saying other than that which they had been told, God sent the plague upon them, and He did not leave a single one of them. (...) «'S¹o We sent down upon the evil-doers an torment out of heaven for their ungodliness». (...) The sons survived—and in them 'was found' the excellence and worship which are ascribed to the Children of Israel, and the good—and all the fathers were destroyed; the plague destroyed them. [1040]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

Rijz is 'torment'; and everything in the Qur'ān which is *rijz* is 'torment'. [1041; see also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1042]

We have shown that the interpretation of «*rijz*» is 'torment', but God's torment can be of various kinds. God has stated that He sent down affliction from heaven on those whom we have described, and it is possible that this could be a plague or something else, but there is no

indication in the ostensive reading of the Qur'ān or in any confirmed report from the Messenger as to which kind it was. . . .

However, what Ibn Zaid said [1040] seems very likely to be sound because of the Tradition, which I mentioned, in which the Messenger of God states that the plague is an affliction, and that a people had been tormented with it before us. . . . But if I do not say that is certainly so, it is because the Tradition from the Messenger of God does not explain which nation was tormented by it. So it is possible that those so tormented were 'a nation' other than those whom God described in 'this verse'

THE INTERPRETATION OF BI-MĀ KĀNŪ YAFSUQŪNA

We have already shown in this book of ours that the meaning of «*fisq*» is 'departing from something'.² Therefore:

¶ For their abandoning obedience to God and departing from it, 'proceeding' to disobey Him and go against His command.

¹ For this latter, see 74: 5.

² See *Exeg.* 2: 26, p. 185 and [571].

2: 60

وَإِذِ اسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ
فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ
مَشْرَبَهُمْ كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعَثَوْا فِي
الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

*wa-idhi 'stasqā Mūsā li-qaumi-hi fa-qulna 'drib bi-'aṣā-ka 'l-ḥajara
fa-'nfajarat min-hu 'thnatā 'asharata 'ainan qad 'alima kullu unāsīn
mashraba-hum kulū wa-'shrabū min rizqi 'llāhi wa-lā ta'thaw fi 'l-arḍi
mufsidīna*

And when Moses sought water for his people, so We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff'; and there gushed forth from it twelve fountains; every people knew their drinking-place. 'Eat and drink of God's providing, and do not transgress upon the earth working corruption.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDHI 'STASQĀ MŪSĀ LI-QAUMI-HI
FA-QULNA 'DRI B BI-'AṢĀ-KA 'L-ḤAJARA FA-'NFAJARAT
MIN-HU 'THNATĀ 'ASHARATA 'AINAN
QAD 'ALIMA KULLU UNĀSIN MASHRABA-HUM

By His words «And when Moses sought water for his people» He means 'And when Moses sought water from Us for his people', i.e., He asked Us to give his people water to drink. He omitted to mention who was asked and what Moses asked for, because there is an indication of what has been left out in the ostensive wording that is given.

Likewise, something has been dispensed with in His words «so We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff'; and there gushed forth from it twelve fountains», because the apparent 'text' indicates what has been omitted. For the meaning of the passage is: So We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff', and he struck it, and it gushed forth. Mention of the statement about Moses' striking the rock was omitted, since the 'words that are' mentioned indicate what is meant.

It is the same with His words «every people knew their drinking-place», for it means: Every people among them knew their drinking-place. He omitted to mention 'among them' because the 'ostensive' words point to it.

(...)

The people of Moses were the Children of Israel, whose story God narrated in these verses. 'Moses' asked God to give them water to drink when they were wandering about in the wilderness.

⇒ Qatāda:

This was when they were in the desert. They complained of thirst to their prophet, and they were commanded that Moses should strike a rock from Mount 'Sinai' with his staff. They had been carrying it with them, and, when they halted, Moses struck it with his staff and twelve springs gushed forth from it, for every tribe a known spring whose water poured forth for them. [1043]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

This was in the wilderness. 'God' had spread the overcast to shade them, had sent down manna and quails upon them, and had given them clothes which did not wear out or become dirty. A cubic rock was set among them, and Moses was commanded to strike the rock with his staff. Twelve springs gushed forth from it, three from every side, one for every tribe. And every time they left a halting-place they would find this rock with them in the place in which it had been with them where it had been in the first place. [1044; see also 1045, and ⇒ Mujāhid, 1046 and part of 1047]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The tribes (*asbāt*) were the children of Jacob. They were twelve men, each of which begot a tribe (*sibt*), a nation of people. [part of 1047]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

Moses sought water for them in the wilderness, and they were given drink in a stone 'shaped' like the head of a sheep. (...) They would put it inside the food-sack (*juwālaq*) when they set out, and Moses would hit it when he halted, and twelve springs would gush forth from it, one for every tribe of them. Then the Children of Israel would drink from it until, when it was time to set out, the springs would dry up and he would pick it up and put it inside the

food-sack. When he halted, he threw it down and struck it with his staff, and a spring like the sea would gush forth from each side. [1048]

(. .)

As for His words «every people knew their drinking-place», God stated this about them, because their sense of 'drinking' with regard to what God brought forth from the rock for them, which He described in this verse, was different from the senses 'understood' by the rest of mankind with regard to the waters which God has brought forth for them from the mountains and lands and which belong to no one else but God. That is to say that for each of the twelve tribes, God created, from the rock which He described in this verse, one spring from which they, but not the other tribes, drank, no one tribe from them participating in another's drinking. Moreover, each one of these twelve springs had its own place on the stone, which the tribe who drank from it knew. For this reason, God referred specifically to these people by His statement about them: Each people among them, unlike other people, knew where they drank from. For everybody else, with respect to the water which none of them possesses, shares in its sources and outlets, whereas each tribe of these people had their own individual springhead—and no other—among the rock's springheads, which belonged specifically to them and to no other tribe. This is why they were specifically referred to by the statement about them: «every people knew their drinking-place.»

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KULŪ WA-'SHRABŪ MIN RIZQI 'LLĀHI*

This too is 'a case where' giving the ostensive 'text' has made mention of what has been omitted unnecessary. That is to say:

¶ We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff', and he struck it, and twelve springs gushed forth from it; every people knew their drinking-place. Then they were told: 'Eat and drink of God's providing.'

God stated that He commanded them to eat the manna and quails that He had provided for them in the wilderness, and to drink the water which He had caused to pour forth there for them from the rock they took turns with, which had no fixed place on the earth, to which there was no access 'except' for its possessors, and which spouted out springs

of, and overflowed with sources of, sweet, fresh water, by the power of Him to Whom glory and tribute belong.

Then, together with permitting them what He had permitted, and blessing them with the agreeable life He had blessed them with, He commanded them not to spread corruption in the land, or arrogantly do mischief there, and said to them: «and do not transgress upon the earth working corruption.»

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ TA'THA WFI 'L-ARḌ MUFSIDĪNA

¶ Do not exceed the proper limits [⇒ Ibn Zaid, 1050], do not spread corruption in the land [⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1051; also ⇒ Qatāda, 1052, and ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1053].

The basic meaning of 'athā is a high degree of corruption (*ifsād*), indeed it is the highest degree of corruption. It is 'used of someone' . . . when he exceeds to the utmost in depravity.

§ There is a brief discussion of the vocalization of the verb from which 'athā is derived.

2: 61

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَمُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُّصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَحِدٍ فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ مِنْ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسِهَا وَبَصِلِهَا قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ أَهْبِطُوا مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّنَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ

wa-idh qultum yā-Mūsā lan naṣbira 'alā ṭa'āmin wāḥidin fa-'d'u la-nā rabba-ka yukhrij la-nā mim-mā tunbitu 'l-'arḍu min baqli-hā wa-qiththā'i-hā wa-fūmi-hā wa-'adasi-hā wa-baṣali-hā qālā a-tastabdilūna 'lladhī huwa adnā bi-'lladhī huwa khairun ihbiṭū miṣran fa-inna la-kum mā sa'altum wa-ḍuribat 'alay-himu 'l-dhillatu wa-'l-maskanatu wa-bā'u bi-ghaḍabin mina 'llāhi dhālika bi-anna-hum kānū yakfurūna bi-āyāti 'llāhi wa-yaqtulūna 'l-nabīyīna bi-ghairi 'l-ḥaqqi dhālika bi-mā 'aṣaw wa-kānū ya'tadūna

And when you said: 'Moses, we will not endure one sort of food; pray to the Lord for us, that he may bring forth for us of that which the earth produces—herbs, cucumbers, wheat/garlic, lentils, and onions.' He said: 'Would you have what is meaner in exchange for what is better? Go down into Egypt! There you shall have what you demanded.' And abasement and poverty were imposed upon them, and they returned to God's anger; that, because they had rejected the signs of God and slain the prophets unrightfully; that, because they disobeyed and were transgressors.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDH QULTUM YĀ-MŪSĀ LAN NAṢBIRA 'ALĀ ṬA'ĀMIN WĀḤIDIN FA-'D'U LA-NĀ RABBA-KA YUKHRIJ LA-NĀ MIM-MĀ TUNBITU 'L-'ARḌU MIN BAQLI-HĀ WA-QITHTHĀ'I-HĀ WA-FŪMI-HĀ WA-'ADASI-HĀ WA-BAṢALI-HĀ

WE have previously demonstrated the meaning of *ṣabr*, that it is restraining of the soul, and withholding it from something.¹ Since this is the case:

¶ And remember when you said, O you Children of Israel: 'We will not be able to confine ourselves to a single kind of food'—and the 'single kind of food' was what God stated that He had fed them in the wilderness, which was quails according to the opinion of some interpreters, but 'bread of white flour with meat' according to Wahb b. Munabbih—'So ask your Lord for us to bring forth some of what the earth produces: herbs, cucumbers', and what God named besides these; and He mentioned that they asked Moses this.

According to what has reached us, the reason they asked this of Moses was:

⇒Qatāda, concerning His words «And when you said: 'Moses, we will not endure one sort of food'»:

«God¹ had spread the overcast to shade the people in the open desert, and had sent down manna and quails upon them, and they had become weary of this, and had remembered the life they had led in Egypt, so they asked Moses 'to do' this. But God said: «'Go down into Egypt! There you shall have what you demanded.'» [1054; see also 1055, and ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1056]

Qatāda also said: When they arrived in Syria, they failed to find the food they had been eating, so they said: «'P¹ray to the Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us of what the earth produces—herbs, cucumbers, wheat/garlic, lentils and onions'»; they had already had the overcast spread to shade them, and manna and quails had been sent down upon them, but they had grown weary of this, and remembered the life they had had in Egypt.

⇒Ibn Abī Najīh:

«'We will not endure one sort of food'—manna and quails—so they exchanged it for herbs and what was mentioned together with them. [1057, ⇒Mujāhid, 1058, 1059]

(..)

§ Ṭabarī mentions two opinions about the meaning of «*min*» in «*mim-mā*» (the *-n* changes to an *-m* because of the following *m*-). The first opinion is that it is partitive, while the second is that it is redundant. The second opinion would give the interpretation '... to bring forth for us the herbs, etc., which the earth produces', but, following a group of Arabic experts whom he cites as denying that *min* is ever superfluous, Ṭabarī interprets the passage according to the first opinion as: 'So pray to your Lord for us, that He may bring forth for us some of the herbs, cucumbers, etc., which the earth produces.'

The 'herbs', 'cucumbers', 'lentils', and 'onions' are the plants and seeds of the earth which people ordinarily understand.

[T]: «*FŪM*»: FIRST OPINION: Some said that it is wheat and bread [⇒'Aṭā' b. Abī Ribāḥ, 1062; ⇒'Aṭā' and Mujāhid, 1063; ⇒Mujāhid, 1064; ⇒Abū Mālik, 1067, 1069; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1068; also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1074; and, as 'the grain which people use to make bread', ⇒Qatāda,

1070; ⇒Qatāda and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1065, 1066; and, as 'bread' ⇒'Aṭā' b. Abī Ribāḥ, 1071; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1072; and, as 'wheat and bread', ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1073].

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Fūm is 'wheat' in the tongue of the Banū Hāshim. [1075]

(..)

SECOND OPINION: Others said that it is garlic [⇒Mujāhid, 1077; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1078], and in some recitations 'of the Qur'ān, the text is' «*wa-thūmi-hā* (= garlic)»

ṬABARĪ'S COMMENTS: It has been mentioned that in the ancient language wheat and bread were collectively called *fūm* It is also mentioned that this, 'i.e.,' «*thūmi-hā*» with *th-*, is the recitation of 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd.² If this is correct, it is . . . because *fā'* and *thā'* are close to each other in articulation. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLA A-TASTABDIL ŪNA 'LLADHĪ HUWA ADNĀ BI-'LLADHĪ HUWA KHAIRUN

¶ Moses said to them: 'Would you take what is baser in weight, price, and worth, in exchange for what is better than it in weight, price, and worth?' That was their exchange (*istibdāl*).

The basic meaning of *istibdāl* is 'to abandon one thing for another which takes its place'.

The meaning of . . . «*adnā*» is 'baser, inferior, lower in value and price', and it comes from . . . *danīy*. . . . There is no doubt that whoever sold herbs, cucumbers, lentils, onions, and garlic in exchange for manna and quails would be selling an inferior form of sustenance for a superior one.

One of 'the interpreters' has interpreted His words «*alladhī huwa adnā*» to mean: That which is closer. He has taken His word «*adnī*» as the elative of the word *dunūw*, which has the meaning of nearness.

A number of interpreters have interpreted the meaning of 'this passage' in a similar way to ours.

⇒Qatāda:

«'Would you have what is meaner in exchange for what is better?'». He is saying: 'Would you have what is evil in exchange for what is better than it?' [1079]

⇒Mujāhid:

«... what is meaner ...» means¹ 'worse'. [1080]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *IHBIṬŪ MIṢRAN*
FA-INNA LA-KUM MĀ SA'ALTUM

¶ Then Moses prayed 'to Us to give them to eat what they demanded', and We responded to him; We said to them: 'Go down into a city.'

This is 'a case of' omission where the evidence of the ostensive 'text' has made mention of what has been omitted unnecessary.

We have already shown that the meaning of *hubūṭ* is 'to stop' at a place, 'to alight' there.³

(...)

[R]: «*MIṢR*»: Most reciters read «*miṣran*» . . . , but some of them left out the final -*n*. Those who read the final -*an* meant some big city, but not a specific one,⁴ and the interpretation according to their reading is: 'Go down to a big city, for you are in the desert and what you are looking for 'can't be found' among the Bedouin and the desert-people, but only in towns and cities. If you go down to 'a big city', you will have the sustenance you ask for.'

It is possible that some of those who recited this with the final -*an* thought that the interpretation of the passage was 'Go down to Egypt!', the country which is known by the name of Miṣr, which is where the 'Children of Israel' had fled from. However, they retained the final -*an* following the text of the recension. . . , and recited it with the final -*an* in the same way as «*qawārīran min fidḍatin*» (76: 15-6) is recited with a final -*an* following the text of the recension.⁵

As for those who did not retain the final -*n*, there is no doubt that they understood 'Egypt', the Miṣr which is itself known by that name unlike any other country.

[T]: «*MIṢR*»: FIRST OPINION

⇒Qatāda:

«'Go down to a *miṣr*»—i.e., to a big city—'there' you will have what you ask for.' [1081, also 1083]

⇒Al-Suddī:

«'Go down to a big city», 'where' you will have what you ask for.' When they left the wilderness, the manna and quails were taken away and they ate herbs. [1082]

⇒Mujāhid:

«'Go down to a *miṣr*'»: one of the big cities. It is said that they never went back to Egypt. [1084]

⇒Ibn Wahb:

Ibn Zaid said: «'Go down to a *miṣr*'»: one of the big cities. Miṣr (= Egypt) is not treated as a triptote in speech.'

Someone said: 'Which city?' He said: 'The Holy Land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*), which God had prescribed for them.' And he recited the words of God: «'Enter the Holy Land which God has prescribed for you'» (5: 21). [1085]

SECOND OPINION: Others said: It is Miṣr where Pharaoh was.

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

By «*miṣran*» He means the Egypt of Pharaoh. [1086; and ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1087]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: One of the proofs of those who said that God meant 'a big city' by His words «*ihbiṭū miṣran*», not the Egypt of Pharaoh specifically¹, i.e., those who held the first opinion above¹, is that God appointed the land of Syria as a place of abode for the Children of Israel after they had left Egypt. He tested them with the wilderness for having refused Moses in the battle of the Arrogant, when he said to them: «'O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has prescribed for you, and do not turn back in your traces, to turn about losers.' * They said: 'Moses, there are people in it very arrogant; we will not enter it until they depart from it; if they depart from it then we will enter.' * Said two of those that feared God whom God had blessed: 'Enter against them at the gate! When you enter it, you will be victors. Put all your trust in God, if you are believers.' * They said: 'Moses, we will never enter it as long as they are in it. Go forth, you and your Lord, and do battle; we will be sitting here.'» (5: 21-4) Then, according to what has been quoted to us, God made it unlawful for those who had thus spoken to enter there so that they perished in the wilderness. He tried them with wandering in the land for 40 years, and then settled their offspring down in Syria and made the Holy Land

their home, and caused the destruction of the Arrogant at their hands under Joshua (Yūsha' b. Nūn) after the death of Moses. We have seen that God stated about them that He prescribed the Holy Land for them, but He does not inform us about them that He sent them back to Egypt after having brought them out of there, which would allow us to recite «*ihbiṭū Miṣra*» and interpret it as 'He sent them back there.'

OBJECTION: 'What about' God's words: «So We expelled them¹, i.e., Pharaoh's followers¹ from gardens and fountains * and treasures and a noble station; * even so, and We bequeathed the¹se¹ upon the Children of Israel» (26: 57-9)?

REPLY: God indeed bequeathed this to them, and put them in possession of it, but He did not return them there; He appointed Syria as their dwelling-place.

Among the proofs which are cited by those who said 'that' by His words «*ihbiṭū Miṣra*» He meant Egypt¹, i.e., those who held the second opinion above, are¹ the verse¹s 26: 57-9 . . . and His words «They left how many gardens and fountains, * sown fields, and how noble a station, * and what prosperity they had rejoiced in! * Even so; and We bequeathed 'this' to another people.» (44: 25-7) They said 'that' God stated that He had bequeathed them this and appointed it for them. They would not have become heirs to it, and then not have made use of it. They say 'that' they could not have used it had some of them not gone there, otherwise they was no way they could have benefitted from it if they, or some of them, had not gone there. They 'also' said 'that' another 'proof' is that in the recensions of Ubaiy b. Ka'b and 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd there is «*ihbiṭū Miṣra*» without the final 'n'. . . . This is, they said, a clear proof that it is Egypt, specifically.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: What we say about this is that there is no indication in the Book of God as to which of these two interpretations is correct, nor is there any report from the Messenger which would settle the matter, and the interpreters gave conflicting interpretations. According to us, the most proper thing to say about this is: Moses asked his Lord to give his people the plants of the earth which his people had demanded—as God has explained in His Book—while they were wandering over the earth; and God answered Moses' prayer, and commanded him to go down with those of his people who were with him to one of the earth's settlements which would supply them with

these things they had demanded, for only towns and cities produce what they had demanded, and He would give them this when they went there. It is possible that this settlement could have been Egypt, but it could 'also' have been Syria.

As for the recitation, it is with the final *an*: «*ihbiṭū miṣran*». It is not permissible, in our view, to have any other reading, because all the manuscripts that the Muslims have concur, and the reciters' recitation¹s agree, on this. And it has been read without the ending-*an* only by someone whose testimony cannot permissibly be used to object to the authoritative reciters in a case where the reading is abundantly attested among them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ḌURIBAT 'ALAY-HIMU 'L-DHILLATU WA-'L-MASKANATU

By «*ḍuribat*» is meant 'abasement and poverty were imposed and laid down for them', as when someone says 'The imām imposed (*ḍaraba*) the capital tax (*jizya*) on free non-Muslim subjects', or 'The man imposed land tax on his slave', meaning thereby that he . . . obliged him 'to pay' it, or 'The commander imposed a sortie on his troops', meaning that he made it their duty.

(...)

«'D'hilla» is the humility 'with regard to' which God commanded His believing servants not to give them¹, i.e., the non-Muslim people of scripture,¹ security—as long as they continued to disbelieve in Him and in His Messenger—unless they paid the capital tax to them; God said: «Fight those who believe not in God and the Last Day and do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden—such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book—until they pay the capital tax out of hand, being humble.» (9: 69)

⇒ Al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī¹ and Qatāda:

'«And abasement and poverty were imposed upon them»: they 'had to' pay the capital tax out of hand, humbly. [1088]

As for «*maskana*», it is the verbal noun 'related to the adjective' *miskīn* (= poor). . . . In this place, «*maskana*» is the poverty of indigence and neediness; it is the humility and abasement of this 'state'.

⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya:

'«*Maskana*» is¹ indigence. [1089]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«Maskana» is¹ poverty. [1090]

⇒ Ibn Wahb:

Ibn Zaid said about His words «and abasement and poverty were imposed upon them»: 'These are the Jews of the Children of Israel.' I said: 'Are they the Copts of Egypt?' He said: 'What have the Copts of Egypt to do with this? No, by God, they are not; but they are the Jews, the Jews of the Children of Israel.' [1091]

¶ God informed them that He would give them humiliation instead of honour, misery instead of blessing, wrath instead of being pleased with them, as a requital from Him to them for their disbelief in His signs, and for their slaying of His prophets and Messengers, an assault and an iniquity from them without any right, disobeying Him and opposing Him.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-BĀ' Ū BI-GHAḌABIN MINA 'LLĀHI*

(...)

¶ They turned back, departing, suffering God's wrath; wrath from God had befallen them, His displeasure had become necessary for them.

(...)

We have previously given the meaning of God's wrath against His servant in this Book of ours, and there is no need to repeat it here.⁶

THE INTERPRETATION OF *DHĀLIKA BI-ANNA-HUM KĀNŪ
YAKFURŪNA BI-ĀYĀTI 'LLĀHI WA-YAQTULŪNA 'L-NABĪYĪNA
BI-GHAYRI 'L-ḤAQQI*

By «that» He means the imposition of abasement and poverty on them, and His bringing down His wrath upon them. By His saying «that», meaning thereby what we have described, He indicated that when someone says 'that (*dhālik*)', he may include many meanings to which he thereby alludes.

(...)

We have already explained in our book that *kufṛ* means 'to cover' something and 'to conceal' it,⁷ and that «the signs of God» are His

proofs, His tokens, His indicants of His Oneness and the veracity of His Messengers.⁸

(...)

«Nabīyūn» is plural, and its singular is *nabīy* without a *hamza*, although originally it has a *hamza* because it comes from «the IVth form verb» *anbā'a* (= to inform). . . . Then the *hamza* (') of *nabī* changed to a *yā'* (-y) and it became *nabīy*.

§ Ṭabarī then gives an extended discussion of the plural, which is usually *anbiyā'*—following the pattern for the plural of words of the form *fa'il* with a final *yā'* or *wāw*, *af'ilā'*—, but which also has the less common form *nubā'*, following another pattern for the plural of words of the form *fa'il*, *fu'alā'*.

And one «philologist»⁹ said that *nabīy* and *nubūwa* (= prophethood) have no *hamza* because they come from *nabwa*, which is like *najwa*, and means an 'elevated place'; and he said that the basic meaning of *nabīy* is a 'track (*ṭarīq*)'. ‡ He said that a track is called *nabīy*, from *nabwa*, because it is clearly visible. He also said that he never heard anyone pronouncing *nabīy* with a *hamza*.

Now we have mentioned and explained enough about this, God willing.

By «and slain the prophets unrightfully» He means that they used to kill the Messengers of God without God's leave, denying their Messages and rejecting their prophethood.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *DHĀLIKA BI-MĀ 'AṢAW
WA-KĀNŪ YA'TADŪNA*

«T^hat» refers back to the first «that», thus:

¶ And abasement and poverty were imposed upon them, and they returned with God's anger, because they had rejected the signs of God and slain the prophets unrightfully, because of their disobedience towards their Lord and their transgressing His limits.

. . . «Transgression» is the overstepping of the limit which God has set for His servants. Anyone who oversteps the bounds of something has transgressed into where he has stepped. . . .

¹ See Exeg. 2: 45, p. 248.

² Al-Farrā' (1955), I, 41 (Sh. & Sh., II, 130, n. 2).

³ See Exeg. 2: 36, p. 256.

⁴ The common noun *miṣr* is fully declinable, and can thus take the indefinite accusative ending

-an, as in this verse, but Miṣr, Egypt, being a female proper noun of foreign origin, is a diptote, declined with only two endings, -u and -a; its accusative is Miṣra.

⁵ *Qawārīr*, the plural of *qārūra* (=flagon), is also diptote, and should not normally take the ending -an. The recitation of this phrase is properly «*qawārīrā min fidḍatin*», the final -u of *qawārīran* being assimilated into the m- of *min*.

⁶ See Exeg. 1: 7, pp. 77–8.

⁷ See Exeg. 2: 6, p. 107, and 2: 24, p. 173.

⁸ See Exeg. 2: 39, p. 268.

⁹ Sh. & Sh. (II, 141, n. 3) believe this could be al-Kisāʾī (c. 119/737–189/805), al-Farrāʾī's teacher.

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إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّبِئِينَ مَنْ
ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ
رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

inna 'lladhīna āmanū wa-'lladhīna hādū wa-'l-naṣārā wa-'l-ṣābi'īna
man āmana bi-'llāhi wa-'l-yaum al-ākhirī wa-'āmila ṣāliḥan fa-
la-hum ajru-hum 'inda rabbi-him wa-lā khaufun 'alay-him wa-lā hum
yahzanūna

Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Ṣābi'ūn, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they sorrow.

THE INTERPRETATION OF INNA 'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ WA-'LLADHĪNA HĀDŪ

As for «they that believe», they are those who attest the veracity of the Messenger of God and the truth that he brought them from God. Their faith in this is their attesting its veracity, as we have explained previously in this book of ours.¹

As for «those who are Jews», . . . «*hādū*» means 'they repented', 'and it comes from the verb¹ *hāda*. . . It is said: The Jews are called *yahūd* only because they said: «'W'e have turned to You in repentance (*hudna ilay-ka*).» (7: 156) [⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1094]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'L-NAṢĀRĀ

§ Ṭabarī explains that *naṣārā* is the plural of *naṣrān*, following the broken plural form *fa'ālā* from nouns of the form *fa'lān*, although the singular *naṣrānī* is more common. There is a rare feminine form *naṣrāna* and a rare plural *anṣār*. He then quotes verses which indicate that the Christians were called *naṣārā* because they gave help (*nuṣra*) to one another.

It is also said that they were called *naṣārā* because they lived in a land called Nāṣira (Nazareth). [⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1095]

Others said it is because of His words: «'Jesus said . . . to his apostles: 'Who will be my helpers (*anṣār*) unto God?'» (61: 14)

It has been reported from Ibn 'Abbās through an unsatisfactory chain that he used to say: 'The Christians are called *naṣārā* because the town of Jesus, the son of Mary, was called Nāṣira (Nazareth)' [see also ⇒ Qatāda, 1097, 1098], 'and his companions were called *nāṣirīyūn*, and Jesus was called the Nāṣirī.' [1096]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'L-ṢĀBI'ĪNA

Ṣābi'ūn is the plural of *ṣābi'*, and he is someone who takes on a new religion other than his own, like the Muslim apostate from his religion; and the Arabs call everyone who leaves the religion he was practising for another *ṣābi'* from the verb *ṣaba'a*. One uses this verb for the stars when they come out 'at night', and one says 'so-and-so came suddenly (*ṣaba'a*) upon us at such-and-such a place.'

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some said 'this name' belongs to everybody who leaves his religion for another. They say that by this name God meant a people who had no religion.

⇒ Mujāhid:

The Ṣābi'ūn are neither the Jews nor the Christians, and they have no 'specific' religion. [1100, 1101]

⇒ Mujāhid:

The Ṣābi'ūn are between the Magians and the Jews. Their sacrifices are not to be eaten and their women are not to be married. [1102; also ⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1103]

(..)

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

Mujāhid said: 'The Šābi'ūn are between the Magians and the Jews. They have no 'specific' religion.' I said to 'Aṭā': 'They said that the Šābi'ūn are a tribe like the Sawād. They are neither Magians, nor Jews, nor Christians.' He said: 'We have heard this; and the polytheists said of the prophet: "He has become a Šābi' (qad šaba'a)."'" [1106]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

The Šābi'ūn are 'the people of' one of the religions who were in Mesopotamia 'near' Mosul. They said 'there is no god but God', but they had no cult, no scripture, and no prophet, apart from the belief 'there is no god but God'. (...) They did not believe in the Messenger of God. And so the polytheists used to say of the prophet and his Companions: 'These are Šābi'ūn', comparing them to them. [1107]

SECOND OPINION: Others said they are a people who worship the angels and pray towards the *qibla*.

⇒ Al-Ḥasan 'al-Baṣrī':

Ziyād 'b. Abīh said: 'The Šābi'ūn pray towards the *qibla* and pray the five 'ritual prayers'. (...) 'Muḥammad' wanted to exempt them from the poll tax. (...) Then he was informed afterwards that they worshipped the angels. [1108]

⇒ Qatāda:

The Šābi'ūn are a people who worship the angels, pray towards the *qibla*, and recite the Psalms. [1109]

(..)

THIRD OPINION: Others said that they were rather a religious group among the people of scripture. [⇒ Al-Suddī, 1111]

THE INTERPRETATION OF MAN ĀMANA BI-'LLĀHI WA-'L-YAUMI
'L-ĀKHIRI WA-'AMILA ŠĀLIḤAN FA-LA-HUM AJRU-HUM
'INDA RABBI-HIM

¶ «'Who'oso believes in God and the Last Day »—Whoever accepts and avers the resurrection after death on the Day of the Resurrection, and does deeds of righteousness and obeys God, will find their recompense with their Lord—«their wage awaits them with their

Lord»—the reward for their deeds of righteousness awaits them with their Lord.

QUESTION: Where is the completion of His words «Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Šābi'ūn»?

REPLY: Its completion is the clause where He says: «whoso believes in God and the Last Day», for the meaning of it is 'whosoever among them believe in God and the Last Day'. 'Among them' is omitted because the passage indicates it, making mention of what has been omitted unnecessary.

QUESTION: So what is the meaning of the passage?

REPLY

¶ Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Šābi'ūn, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, their wage awaits them with their Lord.

QUESTION: How 'can' they who believe come to believe?

REPLY: The meaning 'of «āmana»' with respect to «they who believe» is not the meaning you suppose, i.e., of a transition from one religion to another, as when the Jew or the Christian changes to the 'true' Faith, although it has been said that those who are meant by this are those of the people of scripture who believed in Jesus and what he brought until they reached 'the time of' Muḥammad and believed in him and attested his truthfulness, and those who believed in Jesus and what he brought, when they reached 'the time of' Muḥammad, were told: 'Believe (āminū) in Muḥammad and what he brought'. However, the meaning of the belief of him who believes here is his enduring in his faith and renouncing any change in it. As for the belief of the Jews, the Christians and the Šābi'ūn, it is 'their' attesting the truthfulness of Muḥammad and what he brought. Whoever among them comes to believe in Muḥammad, in what he brought and in the Last Day, and works righteousness, and does not alter or change so that he dies in this 'faith', the reward for his deeds and his wage awaits him with his Lord, as He has described.

§ Ṭabarī answers a question about the lack of agreement between an apparently singular «man āmana (= whoso believes)» and a plural pronoun «hum (= them)» in «their wage awaits them with their Lord». He points out that man

is used with a singular verb alike for one, two, or more persons, male or female. He supports this with a Qur'ānic verse (10: 42-3) and a couple of poetic quotations.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA LĀ KHAUFUN 'ALAY-HIM*
WA-LĀ-HUM YAḤZANŪNA

¶ And no fear shall come upon them with regard to the terrors of the Resurrection they have come to, neither shall they sorrow for this world and its life which they have left behind, when they witness the reward and the enduring blessings which God has prepared for them with Him.

Some said that¹ by His words «whoso believes in God» are meant the believers among the people of the scripture who reached the time of¹ the Messenger of God.

⇒ Al-Suddī:

This verse was sent down concerning the companions of Salmān al-Fārisī. Salmān was from Jundishapur, and was one of their notables. The son of the king was a friend of his, like a brother. Neither of them would do anything without his companion, and they used to ride to the hunt together. Once¹ while they were at the hunt, they espied from afar a woollen tent. They came up to it, and when they were inside they found themselves¹ with a man who had a scroll from which he was reciting while weeping. They asked him: 'What is this?' And he said: 'He who wishes to know this does not stay up¹ on his horse¹ like you; if you want to know what is in it, dismount so that I can instruct you.' So they dismounted, and he said to them: 'This book comes from God, and¹ in it He commands obedience, and forbids disobedience, to Him. In it is that you should not fornicate, nor steal, nor take another's property in vain.' Then he narrated to them what was in it, which was the Evangel which God had revealed to Jesus, and it entered into their hearts, and they accepted it and submitted. And he said to them: 'Indeed, the animals slaughtered by your people are now¹ unlawful to you.'

They stayed thus with him learning from him, until there was a festival for the king, and he arranged a banquet. Then he gathered together the people and the notables, and sent word to the king's son inviting him to his banquet to eat with the people. But the

youth declined, and said: 'I am occupied away from you, so eat, you and your companions.' When many messengers had come to him, he informed them that he would not eat their food. Then the king sent for his son and called him, and said: 'What is this you are up to?' He said: 'We will not eat the animals slaughtered by you, you are unbelievers, and your slaughtered animals are not lawful.' So the king said: 'Who commanded you to this?' So he informed him that the monk had thus commanded him. Then the king¹ called for the monk, and said to him: 'What is my son saying?' He said: 'Your son is telling the truth.' He said to him: 'If blood were of no importance among us, I should kill you. However, be exiled from our land!' And he set a term for his leaving¹. Salmān said: 'We started to weep for him.' And the monk¹ said to the two of them: 'If you are sincere, we are with sixty men in a church in Mosul where we worship God, come to us there.'

Then the monk left, and Salmān and the king's son stayed behind. Then Salmān¹ began to say to the king's son: 'Come away with us', and the king's son said: 'Yes.' And the king's son started to sell his things, wanting to make preparations to leave¹. But since he was holding Salmān up, Salmān went away in order to reach them, and he lived with his companion, who was the lord of the church. The folk of this church were of the most excellent monks, and Salmān strove with them in worship and wore himself out. So the *shaikh* said to him: 'You are a young man who has taken upon yourself more than you can bear. I am afraid lest you become fatigued and loose strength; be gentle with yourself and lighten your load.' Then Salmān said: 'Do you think that what you command me to do is better, or what I am doing?' He said: 'Rather what you are doing.' He said: 'So leave me alone.'

Then the owner of the church called him, and said: 'Do you know that this church belongs to me, and that I am the person with the most right to it, and that if I wanted to send these people away I would do it. But I am too weak to worship like they do, and I want to move from this church to another one where they are easier in worship than these monks¹. If you wish to stay here, stay, but if you want to come away with me, then come away.' Salmān said to him: 'Which of the two churches has the better folk?' He said: 'This one.' Salmān said: 'Then I shall be here.' So Salmān stayed there, and the owner of the church recommended

Salmān to the learned *ṣhaikh*¹ of the church, and Salmān devoted himself to the worship of God with them.

Then the learned *shaikh* planned to go to Jerusalem, and said to Salmān: 'If you wish to come away with me, come, but if you want to stay, then stay.' So Salmān said to him: 'Which is better: to go with you or to stay?' He said: 'No, rather you should come away with me.' So he went with him. They passed a disabled man fallen on the road, and when he saw them he cried out: 'O Master of monks, have mercy on me, may God have mercy on you!' But he did not speak to him or look at him. They went on their way until they reached Jerusalem. The *shaikh* said to Salmān: 'Go out and seek knowledge. Those who are present in this mosque are the learned of the people of the earth.' So Salmān went out to learn from them.

One day he returned sad, and the *shaikh* said to him: 'What is wrong, Salmān?' He said: 'I see that the prophets and their followers who were before us have taken away everything which is good!' The *shaikh* said to him: 'Salmān, do not be sad. There remains a prophet who is better to be followed than any other prophet, and this is his time, in which he will come forth. I do not think I shall see him; but you, you are young, perhaps you will see him. He will come forth in the land of the Arabs, and if you see him, believe in him and follow him.' Then Salmān said to him: 'Tell me something about his signs.' He said: 'Yes. He will be stamped on his back with the seal of prophethood; he will accept presents, but he will not accept charity.'

Then they returned until they reached the place where the disabled man was, and he cried out to them and said: 'O Master of monks, have mercy on me, may God have mercy on you!' So *ṣhaikh*¹ turned his donkey towards him and took him by his hand and lifted him up. Then he threw him to the ground and called to him and said: 'Stand up, by God's leave.' Then he stood up in good health and ran away. And Salmān marvelled as he saw him run away. Then the monk rode away so that he disappeared from Salmān's sight¹, and Salmān did not know *ṣhaikh*¹ where he had gone¹.

Salmān was then afraid, and went in search of the monk. Two men of the Arabs of *ṣhaikh*¹ the tribe of Kalb met him, and he asked them: 'Have you seen the monk?' One of the two dismounted from his camel. He said: 'What a wonderful herdsman this is!' And he lifted him up and carried him away to Medina.

Salmān said: 'Then a *ṣhaikh*¹ of sadness befell me like I had never felt before.' Then a woman of *ṣhaikh*¹ the tribe of Juhaina bought him, and he and a slave of hers tended her animals, taking turns with the sheep: one day this one, the next the other. Thus did Salmān amass dirhams awaiting Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. One day, while he was tending the flock, his companion came to him to take over from him and said: 'Are you aware that this day there has come to Medina a man who claims that he is a prophet?' Salmān said to him: 'Stay with the sheep until I come to you!'

So Salmān went down to Medina. He saw the Prophet and walked around him. When the Prophet saw him, he knew what he wanted, and he let his garment fall so that his seal became visible. When *ṣhaikh*¹ Salmān saw it, he came up to him and spoke with him. Then he went away and made some purchases with a dinar, with some of it a sheep, and with some of it some bread, and came *ṣhaikh*¹ back to him. *ṣhaikh*¹ The prophet said: 'What is this?' Salmān said: 'This is charity.' He said: 'I have no need of it, so send it away. May the Muslims eat it.' *ṣhaikh*¹ Salmān then went away and bought some bread and meat with another dinar, and brought it to the prophet. He said: 'What is this?' He said: 'This is a gift.' He said: 'Sit down *ṣhaikh*¹ and eat¹.' So he sat down, and they ate of it together. While he was speaking to him, he mentioned his companions and told him about them, and said: 'They used to fast and pray, and they believed in you; and they attested that you would be delegated as a prophet.' When Salmān had finished praising them, the prophet said to him: 'O Salmān, they are of the people of the Fire.' This distressed Salmān, since he had said to the prophet: 'If they had seen you they would have attested your truthfulness and followed you.' Then God sent down this verse: «Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the *Ṣābi'ūn*, whoso believes in God and the Last Day». [1112]

The faith of the Jews was that they held to the Torah and the *sunna* of Moses,² until Jesus came. When Jesus came, those who held to the Torah and observed the *sunna* of Moses and did not abandon it and follow Jesus were doomed.

*ṣhaikh*¹ As for the faith of the Christians: those of them that held to the Evangel and the prescriptions of Jesus were believers *ṣhaikh*¹ whose faith was accepted, until Muḥammad came, and those of them who did not

follow Muḥammad and abandon the *sunna* of Jesus and the Evangel which they practised were doomed.

⇒ Mujāhid:

Salmān al-Fārisī asked the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, about those Christians and their deeds which he had seen. He said: 'They did not die in submission to God (*islām*).' Salmān said: 'Then the earth grew dark over me, and I mentioned their striving.' Then this verse came down: «Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews». He called for Salmān and said: 'This verse has come down concerning your companions.' Then the Prophet said: 'Whosoever dies in the religion of Jesus and dies in submission to God before he hears of me is in a good 'position', but whosoever hears of me today and does not believe in me is doomed.' [1113]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, concerning 'this verse' . . . :

After this God sent down: «Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.» (3: 85) [1114]

This report shows that Ibn 'Abbās was of the opinion that God had promised the Garden in the Hereafter to those Jews, Christians, and Ṣābi'ūn who worked righteousness by virtue of their deeds, and that he then abrogated this by His words «Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him».

The interpretation of this verse is therefore, according to what we have quoted from Mujāhid and al-Suddī: Indeed those of this community who believe, and those who are Jews, Christians, and Ṣābi'ūn—those Jews, Christians, and Ṣābi'ūn who believe in God and the Last Day—their wage awaits them with their Lord; and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they sorrow.

['However'] the first interpretation which we gave is the nearest to the ostensive meaning of the revelation, because God has not specified the wage for righteous action together with faith for some of His creatures rather than others, and the statement in his words «whoso believes in God and the Last Day» applies to everyone He mentioned at the beginning of the verse.

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 3, p. 95.

² For *sunna*, see *Exeg.* 2: 16, n. 1.

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وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

wa-idh akhadhnā mīthāqa-kum wa-rafa'nā fauqa-kumu 'l-tūra khudhū mā ātainā-kum bi-qūwatin wa-'dhkurū mā fī-hi la'alla-kum tattaqūna

And when We took compact with you, and raised above you the Mount: 'Take vigorously what We have given you, and remember what is in it, so that you may be God-fearing.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH AKHADHNĀ MĪTHĀQA-KUM*

A *MĪTHĀQ* (=compact) . . . can be by oath or by covenant or by other means¹

By His words «And when We took compact with you» He means the compact which God stated that He took with them in His words «And when We took compact with the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents'» (2: 83–5) The reason He took compact with them, according to what Ibn Zaid mentioned, is:

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

Then God sent His angels, and they shook the mountain over them, and it was said to them: 'Do you know this?' They said: 'Yes, this is the Mount.' They said: 'Take the scripture, otherwise we shall fling it down upon you.' (...) Then they took it with the compact. (...) «And when We took the compact with the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents' . . . And God is not heedless of the things you do.» (2: 83–5) (...) If they had taken it the first time, they would have taken it without the compact. [1115; refer to 959, of which this is a continuation, for the first part of the narration.]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-RAFA'NĀ FAUQA-KUMU 'L-TŪRA*

Tūr is 'mountain' in the speech of the Arabs.†

[†]: «*TŪR*»: It is said that it is the name of a specific mountain, and it is

mentioned that it is the mountain on which God confided in Moses. And it is said that it is those mountains on which things grow but not those on which nothing grows.

FIRST OPINION: It is 'mountain', whichever one it may be.

⇒Mujāhid:

Moses commanded his people to enter in at the gate prostrating and to say '*Ḥiṭṭatun*', and the gate was lowered for them so that they would prostrate, but they did not prostrate, and went in on their buttocks, saying: '*Ḥinṭatun*'. So He shook the mountain (*al-ṭūr*) over them—meaning that He brought the root of the mountain out of the ground and raised it up over them like a canopy, and *ṭūr* in Syriac is 'mountain'—frighteningly (*takhwīfan*)—or 'afraid (*khaufan*)', Abū 'Āṣim 'one of the transmitters' was not sure—, and they entered prostrating in fear, with their eyes towards the mountain. This was the mountain to which its Lord manifested Himself. [1116; 1027 is part of the same Tradition. See also 1117, and ⇒Qatāda, 1118, 1119]

(..)

SECOND OPINION: Others said that *Ṭūr* is the name of the mountain on which God confided in Moses. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1124]

THIRD OPINION: Others said that *ṭūr* is specifically a mountain on which things grow. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1125]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KHUDHŪ MĀ ĀTAINĀ-KUM BI-QŪWATIN*

(...)

¶ «'Take what We have given you'—what We have commanded you to do in the Torah . . .—«*bi-qūwatin*»—with assiduity in executing what He commanded you therein and prescribed for you.'

⇒Mujāhid:

¶ «'Take vigorously what is in it'» means: 'Practice what is in it'. [1126, 1127]

(..)

⇒Al-Suddī:

«'V'igorously» means 'with assiduity and effort'. [1130]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

¶ It means: 'Take the scripture which Moses brought sincerely and truly'. [1131]

¶ 'Take the duties We have prescribed for you in Our Book, accept them, and strive to perform them, without any diminution 'therein'. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-'DHKURŪ MĀ FĪ-HI LA'ALLA-KUM TATTAQŪNA*

¶ Remember the firm Promise and Threat, the encouragement and dissuasion, that is in Our Book which We have given you, and recite it and take warning from it, and ponder upon it when you do this, so that you may be God-fearing and fear My punishment for persisting in your errancy, and come to obey Me and refrain from the disobedience towards Me that you now practice [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1132].

What God gave them was the Torah. [⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1133; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1134]

(..)

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 27, pp. 186–90.

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ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ
وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

*thumma tawallaitum min ba'di dhālika fa-law-lā faḍlu 'llāhi 'alay-kum
wa-rahmatu-hu la-kuntum mina 'l-khāsirīna*

Then you turned away thereafter, and but for the bounty of God towards you, and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA TAWALLAITUM
MIN BA'DI DHĀLIKA

By His words «*thumma tawallaitum*» He means 'Then you turned away. 'This verb is literally used' . . . in the expression 'So-and-so turned his back on me' Then it comes to be used 'figuratively' for anyone who fails to obey as he was commanded

§ Ṭabarī gives another Qur'ānic example of the figurative use of *tawallā* (9: 75-6), and asserts the permissibility of a trope here by pointing to the frequency of figurative usage in Arab speech.‡

¶ You failed to act according to what your compact and covenants which We took 'stipulated that you would' assiduously and diligently do, after you had presented your Lord with the compacts to act thus, and 'you failed' to perform what you had been commanded to do in your scripture, and cast it 'all' behind your backs.

By «this» He refers to everything which came before in the preceding verse, i.e., His words «And when We took compact with you, and raised above you the Mount».

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-LAW-LĀ FAḌLU 'LLĀHI 'ALAY-KUM
WA-RAḤMATU-HU

¶ And if God had not bestowed forgiveness on you, after you had broken the compact which you had entered into with Him, when He

raised the Mount over you, for your striving to obey Him, to fulfil His ordinances, to perform what He had commanded you to do, and to desist from what He had forbidden you to do in the Book which He had given you, and 'if' He had 'not' then bestowed upon you Islam and His mercy, by which He showed you compassion—and disregarded the offence which you had perpetrated—for your return to obedience to your Lord, then you would have been among the losers.

§ Those to whom this verse is addressed, Ṭabarī points out, are the people of scripture alive at the time of the Messenger of God in the vicinity of Medina. However, it is quite permissible to ascribe events for which their forefathers had been responsible directly to them. One justification for this, he says, is that Arab tribes ascribe the acts of their ancestors to themselves when they boast to each other. Some exegetes, on the other hand, had defended this direct address to contemporary people of scripture on the grounds that they declared their solidarity with the early Children of Israel who had done these things. Others, again, had said that those who were addressed were well aware that they were being informed about what their forefathers had done, and that no direct reference to them was therefore necessary.‡ Of these three justifications, Ṭabarī gives more weight to the first.

(...)

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

«'The bounty of God' is Islam, and «His mercy» is the Qur'ān.
[1136; also ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1137]

THE INTERPRETATION OF LA-KUNTUM MINA 'L-KHĀSIRĪNA

¶ If it had not been for God's bounty towards you, and His mercy, in delivering you by forgiving you your offence and sin, you would have forever diminished the lot of your own souls, and you would have perished for the sinful violation of your compact, and for contravening His command and obedience to Him.¹

¹ For *khāsirūn*, see *Exeg.* 2: 27, p. 191.

2:65

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنْكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ

wa-la-qad 'alimtumū 'lladhīna 'tadaw min-kum fi 'l-sabti fa-qulnā la-hum kūnū qiradatan khāsi'īna

And you well know there were those among you who transgressed the sabbath, and We said to them: 'Be you apes, miserably slinking!'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA-QAD 'ALIMTUMU'LLADHĪNA
'TADAW MIN-KUM FI 'L-SABTI

(...)

This and the subsequent verses are among those in which God enumerated for the Children of Israel the agreements which they had established—those who were living within the quarters of the Anṣār at the time of the prophet, and whose forefathers' violation of God's compact and covenant He started by mentioning at the beginning of this sura. He warned those whom He hereby addressed lest, for their persistence in unbelief, their continuing to reject the prophethood of Muḥammad, and their failure to follow him and confess the truth of what he had brought them from his Lord, there befall them the same metamorphosis, trembling, and stunning as befell their ancestors, and the 'same' wrath and displeasure against which they could not prevail.

⇒ Ibn 'Aqbās:

«And you well know there were those among you who transgressed the sabbath»; He means: And you have already come to know. This is a warning to them about disobedience. He means: Be warned lest there happen to you what happened to the people of the sabbath when they disobeyed Me and transgressed concerning the sabbath.¹

(...) God sent no prophet without commanding him to 'observe' Friday, informing him of its excellence and importance in the heavens and among the angels, and that the Hour 'of the

Resurrection' falls on 'that day'. Whoever followed the prophets in their practice—as the community of Muḥammad followed Muḥammad—accepted Friday and heard and obeyed, recognizing its excellence and keeping to it—as God commanded His prophet 'Muḥammad' to do. Whoever did not do this was in the position of those whom God mentioned in His Book: «And you well know there were those among you who transgressed the sabbath, and We said to them: 'Be you apes, miserably slinking!'» That is to say, the Jews said to Moses, when he commanded them to 'observe' Friday, and informed them of its excellence: 'O Moses, how can you command us to 'observe' Friday and proclaim its excellence over all 'other' days when Saturday is the best of all days? For God created the heavens and the earth and 'all' nutriment in six days, and on Saturday (*al-sabt*) everything adjourned (*sabata*) 'to worship' Him obediently; and it is the conclusion of the six 'preceding days'.

(...) Likewise the Christians said to Jesus, the son of Mary, when he commanded them to 'observe' Friday . . . : 'How can you command us to 'observe' Friday when the first day 'of the week' is the most excellent, and the lord, of them? The first is the best: God is one, and the first "one" is the best.' So God revealed to Jesus to let them 'observe' Sunday, but that on 'that day' they should do such-and-such—what He commanded them to do. But they did not do so, and God narrates the story of their disobedience in His Book.

(...) Thus also did God say to Moses, when the Jews said to him what they said about Saturday, that he should let them 'observe' Saturday, but that they should not catch any fish, or anything else, on that day, and that they should not do anything, as they had said. But when Saturday came fish used to become visible on the water, and these are His words: «when their fish came to them on the day of their Sabbath, *shurra'an*», meaning 'becoming visible on the water', and this was because of their disobeying Moses. But when it was not Saturday, it became a catch like any other day, and these are His words: «but on the day they did not keep the sabbath, they came not unto them» (7: 163). The fish did this as long as God wished 'them to'.

When they saw things were like this, they wanted to take them, but they feared 'God's' punishment. But one of them took some of them, and they did not hold back from him, and he

awaited the punishment from God which Moses had warned them of. But when they saw that the punishment did not befall them, they went back and told each other that they had taken fish and nothing had happened to them. They did this more and more, and supposed that what Moses had told them was false. This is 'the meaning of' God's words: «And you well know there were those among you who transgressed the sabbath, and We said to them: 'Be you apes, miserably slinking!», meaning 'to those who caught fish', and God transformed them into apes for their disobedience. (...) They then only lived on earth for three days. (...) A metamorphosed being never lives more than three days, it does not eat, drink or procreate. God created apes and swine and the other creatures on the six days which God mentioned in His Book, and He metamorphosed these people into the form of apes. Thus does He do what He wishes, as He wishes, and changes it as He wishes. [1138]

§ Another Tradition from Ibn 'Abbās [1139] mentions that the events narrated in the story of the fish took place when the Jews were at a town between Ayla (Eilat) and Mount Sinai called Madyan. He adds more details to the story, as also does al-Suddī [1142], but also relates it to the verses of sura 7 beginning «And question them concerning the township which was bordering the sea ...» (7: 163).

(..)

⇒Mujāhid:

Their hearts were transformed, and they were not metamorphosed into apes. This is only a similitude which God coined for them, like the similitude of the donkey carrying books.² [1144, also 1143]

This opinion of Mujāhid's is one which contradicts the ostensive meaning of what the Book of God indicated. That is to say that God stated in His Book that He made apes, swine, and worshippers of idols out of them (5: 60); just as He stated of them that they said to their prophet: «'Show us God openly'» (4: 153), and God thunderstruck them when they asked their Lord this; and that they worshipped the Calf and He made their repentance to be that they should kill each other; and that He commanded them to enter the Holy Land, and they said to their prophet: «'Go forth, you and your Lord, and do battle; we will be sitting here'» (5: 24), and so He put them to the test in the wilderness.

And it is the same for one person to say 'He did not change them into apes' when God stated that He made apes and swine from them, as it is for another to say 'Nothing of what God stated about the Children of Israel, of the opposition to their prophets, and of the exemplary punishment and chastisements which God brought down upon them, really existed.' Anyone who denies anything of this and avers some other part of it will be asked for a proof of his opinion, and will be confronted, with respect to what part of it he denies, with the part he affirms. Then he will be asked how this differs from a widespread Report or a sound Tradition.

This is in addition to the disagreement between Mujāhid's opinion and that of all the authorities who cannot be mistaken or lying in what they unanimously transmit. It suffices as a proof of the falsity of an opinion that 'all authorities' should agree that it is mistaken.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-QULNĀ LA-HUM KŪNŪ QIRADATAN KHĀSĪ'ĪNA

¶ We said to those who transgressed on the sabbath.

(...)

The basic meaning of *sabt* 'from the verb *sabata*' is 'rest and repose in comfort and calm'; and that is why someone who sleeps is called *masbūt*, because he is resting, his body is in repose and he is at ease, just as He said: «and We appointed you sleep for a rest (*subātan*)» (78: 9), i.e., a repose for your bodies.

It has been said that it is called *sabt* (=the sabbath) because God finished creating all His creatures on Friday, which is the day before.

(...)

Khāsi' means 'banished', 'driven out', as when one chases away a dog.† . . . Thus the meaning of «*khāsi'īn*» is: banished from good, humiliated, cringing. [See ⇒Mujāhid, 1145-7; ⇒Qatāda, 1148; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1149; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1150]

¹ For 'transgression', see Exeg. 2: 61, p. 355.

² See 62: 5.

2:66

فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً
لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

*fa-ja'alnā-hā nakālan li-mā baina yaday-hā wa-mā khalfa-hā wa-
mau'izatan li-'l-muttaqīna*

And We made it an exemplary punishment for those before it
and those after it, and an admonition for the God-fearing.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-JA'ALNĀ-HĀ

[T]: «AND WE MADE IT»: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

'It means: 'We made this chastisement—which was the metamorphosis—an 'exemplary punishment (*nakāl*)'. [1151(i)]

(...)

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Fa-ja'alnā-hā», i.e., 'We made' the fish. [1151(ii)]

According to this opinion, the pronoun refers to the fish, which have not been mentioned. But since there is an indication in the account, He refers to them indirectly, and the indication to this is His words «And you well know there were those among you that transgressed the sabbath».

§ Tabarī cursorily mentions three more opinions about what 'it' refers to: (i) the town where the fishing took place, (ii) the apes into which the disobedient were metamorphosed, and (iii) the community who transgressed the Sabbath.

THE INTERPRETATION OF NAKĀLAN

Nakāl is the verbal noun from 'the IInd form verb' *nakkala* (=to make an example of someone or something), and its basic meaning is 'punishment'. ‡ [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1152; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1153]

THE INTERPRETATION OF LI-MĀ BAINA YADAY-HĀ WA-MĀ KHALFA-HĀ

§ Tabarī mentions five opinions about the interpretation of this phrase. He prefers the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās related by al-Dahhāk [1154], since, he says, it is in agreement with his preferred interpretation of the pronoun «it» in «And We made it», which recurs twice in the present phrase. According to Tabarī, it refers to the punishment of metamorphosis mentioned in the preceding verse.

If the matter is as we have described it, the interpretation of the verse is: And We said to them: 'Be you apes, despised'; and We made our punishment of them a punishment for those of their previous sins which they had committed before that 'punishment', by Our metamorphosing them and by Our punishing them; and for equivalent sins which come after Our punishing them, whoever commits them will be metamorphosed as they were metamorphosed, what befell them will befall them. This is as a warning from God to His servants that if they commit similar acts of disobedience to those of 'the people' who were metamorphosed, they will be meted out their punishment.

§ Tabarī then discusses interpretations which have all three occurrences of «it» refer to the fish, or to the towns. Although he admits that the Arabs use pronouns to refer to things which have not previously been mentioned, he insists that here it is not permissible to set aside the ostensive, reasonable meaning for a concealed one without evidence from an unambiguous Qur'ānic text, a statement from the Prophet, or widespread consensus.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MAU'IZATAN

Mau'iza is the verbal noun from 'the verb' *wa'aza* (=to admonish).

(...)

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'Mau'iza' means a 'reminder' and a 'warning' to the God-fearing. [1164]

THE INTERPRETATION OF LI-'L-MUTTAQĪNA

As for the «*muttaqīn* (=God-fearing)», they are those who are ever-mindful of God, through carrying out His ordinances and avoiding disobedience to Him.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'A'nd an admonition for the God-fearing» means 'to the believers who guard against polytheism and act in obedience to Me'. [1165]

God has made His punishment that befell those who transgressed the sabbath, an admonition specifically [⇒ Al- Rabī' b. Anas, 1170] for the God-fearing, and a warning for the believers, but not for the unbelievers, up to the Day of the Resurrection [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1166].

⇒ Qatāda:

«'A'nd an admonition for the God-fearing», i.e., to 'those' after them', i.e., after the metamorphosed'. [1167, 1168; also ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1171]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

As for «an admonition for the God-fearing», they are the community of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. [1169]

2: 67

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً قَالُوا
أَتَتَّخِذُنَا هُزُؤًا قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ

*wa-idh qāla Mūsā li-qaumi-hi inna 'llāha ya'muru-kum an tadhbaḥū
baqaratan qālū a-tattakhidhu-nā huzuwan qāla a'ūdhu bi-'llāhi an
akūna mina 'i-jāhilīna*

And when Moses said to his people: 'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said: 'Do you take us in jest?' He said: 'I take refuge with God, lest I should be one of the ignorant.'

THIS verse is part of that with which God rebukes the Children of Israel who are addressed, for their ancestors' violation of the compact which He took from them to obey His prophets. He said to them: And remember also your breaking of My compact «when Moses said to his

people»—and his people were the Children of Israel, when they raised their dispute about the man who was killed among them to him—«'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.' They said: 'Do you take us in jest?'

Huzu' is 'play', 'mockery'. ‡ It is not appropriate that there should be jesting or play on the part of God's prophets in any order or prohibition which they transmit from God. Yet they supposed that when Moses commanded them—from God's command to sacrifice the cow for the man who was killed, about whom they were in dispute—he was jesting and playing. They should not have thought that about God's prophet, who was telling them that it was God who commanded them to sacrifice the cow.

(...)

Then Moses told them . . . that whoever states that God jests and mocks is one of the ignorant, and he absolved himself from what they supposed he was doing, and said: «'I take refuge with God, lest I should be one of the ignorant', i.e., one of the foolish who relate untrue and false things about God.

The cause of Moses' saying to them «'God commands you to sacrifice a cow'» was:

⇒ 'Abīda:

There was, among the Children of Israel, a childless man (...), and one of his relatives killed him, and then carried him away and dumped him with a tribe which was not his own. But malice set in between 'the murderer's tribe and' them on account of this, to the point where they took up arms. (...) Then those who were reasonable said: 'Do you kill each other when the Messenger of God is among you?' (...) So they came to God's prophet, and he said: 'Sacrifice a cow.' «They said: 'Do you take us in jest?' He said: 'I take refuge with God, lest I should be one of the ignorant.' They said: 'Pray to the Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what it should be.' He said: 'He says it is a cow」—up to—«and they sacrificed it, a thing they had scarcely done.» (...) 'The corpse' was smitten, and he told them 'who' his killer 'was'. (...) The cow was only acquired for its weight in gold. (...) If they had acquired an inferior cow, it would have been enough for them. After that no murderer was 'ever' appointed as an heir. [1172]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

There was a man of the Children of Israel, 'who' was wealthy but

had no offspring, but he had a relative who was his heir. 'This relative' killed him to inherit from him, then he dumped him at a cross-roads. Then he came to Moses and said to him: 'My relative has been killed, and a grave matter has happened, but I cannot find anyone to explain to me who killed him, except you, O Prophet of God.' (...) Then Moses proclaimed among the people: 'By God, I implore whoever has knowledge of this to explain it to us.' But they had no knowledge of it.

Then the killer approached Moses and said: 'You are God's prophet. Ask your Lord for us to explain it to us.' So he asked his Lord, and God revealed to him: «'God commands you to sacrifice a cow.'» They were surprised, and said: «'Do you take us in jest?'» He said: 'I take refuge with God, lest I should be one of the ignorant.' * They said: 'Pray to the Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what it should be.' He said: 'He says it is a cow, neither old'—i.e., not decrepit—«'nor virgin'»—i.e., not young—«'middling between the two'»—i.e., middle-aged, between the virgin and the decrepit. «They said: 'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what colour it should be.' He said: 'He says it shall be a golden cow, bright its colour'»—i.e., of an unmixed colour—«'gladdening beholders'»—i.e., amazing beholders. «They said: 'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what she may be; cows look alike to us; and, if God will, we shall then be guided.' * He said: 'He says that it shall be a cow not broken'»—i.e., it has not been worked—«'to plough the earth'» . . . «'or to water the tillage'» . . . «'one kept secure'»—i.e., free from defects—«'with no blemish on her'»—i.e., with no white 'spots' on her. «They said: 'Now you have brought the truth'; and they sacrificed it, a thing they only just did.»

(...) If, when the people had been commanded to sacrifice a cow, they had taken one of the cows without giving it any thought, it would have been that one; but they were hard on themselves, so God was hard on them. And if the people had not made an exception and said «'and, if God will, we shall then be guided'», they would never have been guided to it.

It has reached us that the only cow they found like that which had been described to them belonged to an old woman with whom there were some orphans whose guardian she was. When she understood that no other 'cow' would do for them, she doubled the price. So they came to Moses and informed him that

the only cow with that description belonged to such-and-such a woman, and that she had asked them for double its price. Moses said to them: 'God had made things easy for you, but you were hard on yourselves, so give her what pleases her and what she has asked for.' So they did, and they bought it and sacrificed it. Then Moses commanded them to take one of its bones, and to smite the murdered man with it. So they did, and his spirit returned to him, and he named the person who had killed him for them. Then he became dead once more, as he had been. So they took his murderer—he was the one who had come to Moses and complained to him—and God killed him for his most evil deed. [1173]

§ In another Tradition narrated from al-Suddī [1174], the man who is murdered is a rich man. He has a poor nephew who leads him away one night on a pretext and murders him because he has refused him his daughter in marriage. He then accuses the tribe near whom the murder took place of having murdered him and claims blood-money from them. They then go and complain to Moses, and the dialogue about the cow takes place. Al-Suddī's version of how the cow is found involves a dutiful son to whom a man comes with a pearl to sell one day when his father is sleeping. The son bargains with the pearl-seller, who eventually offers him the pearl at a very advantageous price, but in the end the dutiful son refuses to conclude the deal because he does not want to disturb his father by waking him up to get the money from him. God then compensates him by giving him the cow which Moses had described to the Children of Israel. They come and offer him another cow in exchange, but he refuses. The bargaining continues till they offer him ten cows in exchange, but he still refuses. Then they take him before Moses, who orders him to sell it to them, which he eventually does for ten times its weight in gold. Al-Suddī's version then has the murdered man smitten with a piece of meat from between the sacrificed cow's shoulder-blades. He comes to life and identifies the murderer, who is then killed. Ṭabarī then mentions other Traditions [= Qatāda, 1175; = Mujāhid, 1176, 1177; etc.] which, he points out, agree with the basic outlines of the versions of 'Abīda, Abu 'l-Āliya, and al-Suddī, except that the murderer is variously said to be the man's brother, his nephew, or, by others, a group of inheritors who were impatient for him to die. See also the Traditions mentioned at the end of the exegesis of 2: 72.

قَالُوا أَذْعُ لَنَا رَبِّكَ يُبَيِّنُ لَنَا مَا هِيَ قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ
 إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَا فَارِضٌ وَلَا بِكْرٌ عَوَانٌ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ فَأَفْعَلُوا
 مَا تُمَرُونَ

*qālu 'd'u ia-nā rabba-ka yubayyin la-nā mā hiya qāla inna-hu yaqūlu
 inna-hā baqaratun lā fāriḍun wa-lā bikrun 'awānun baina dhālika
 fa-'f'alū mā tu'marūna*

They said: 'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what it should be.' He said: 'He says it is a cow neither old, nor virgin, middling between the two; so do what you are bidden.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLU 'D'U LA-NĀ RABBA-KA
 YUBAYYIN LA-NĀ MĀ HIYA QĀLA INNA-HU YAQŪLU
 INNA-HĀ BAQARATUN LĀ FĀRIḌUN

AFTER those to whom it had been said «'God commands you to sacrifice a cow'» had understood and been convinced that what Moses had commanded them to do according to God's command to sacrifice a cow was in earnest and true, they said: «'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what it should be.'» They asked Moses to ask his Lord for them about that which God had spared them when He said «'Sacrifice a cow'», because God had only commanded them to kill some cow—any cow they wanted to sacrifice—without narrowing it down for them to one kind or category of 'cow'. And they spoke according to the roughness of their characters, the coarseness of their natures, their misunderstanding, taking upon themselves the burden of something which God had unburdened them of, causing annoyance to the Messenger of God [= Ibn 'Abbās, 1183]. . . . Then, when they asked Him: 'What should it be? What are its qualities? What does it look like? Describe it to us so that we may know what it is?', He said: «'It is a cow neither old, nor virgin'».

§ Ṭabarī cites several Traditions [1184–1195] which support the interpretation of *fāriḍ* as 'old'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LĀ BIKRUN

A *bikr* is a female quadruped or human which no male has possessed; . . . it has no verb. *Bakr*, however, . . . is a young camel. God meant by «*wa-lā bikr*» 'not young and not having borne young' [1196–1204].

THE INTERPRETATION OF 'AWĀNUN

'*Awān* is a middle-aged woman who has borne several young. It is not a description of a virgin. The verb '*awwana* is used when someone becomes like this. . . . The plural is '*ūn*. . . . And 'the Arabs' use '*awān* to describe a war when there has been repeated fighting, comparing it to a woman who has given birth to children again and again. It is also used to describe a need when it has been gratified time after time. [1205–1216]

THE INTERPRETATION OF BAINA DHĀLIKA

By His words «*baina dhālika* (= lit. 'between that')» He means between the virgin and the old [1217].

§ Ṭabarī answers the objection that *baina* (= between) should be followed by two things or more, not just one, as is apparently the case here, by saying that *dhālika* is used by the Arabs to speak of two things or actions.¹ Here, *dhālika* stands for 'old age' and 'youthfulness'. He adds that it is not permissible to say *baina dhālika* when two or more individuals are meant.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-'F'ALŪ MĀ TU'MARŪNA

¶ God says to them: 'Do what I have commanded you to do, and you will attain what you need and what you seek with Me. Sacrifice the cow which I have commanded you to sacrifice, and you will find out who killed your murder victim, by finally obeying Me and sacrificing it.'

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 61, p. 354.

قَالُوا أَذْعُ لَنَا رَبِّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا لَوْنُهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا
بَقَرَةٌ صَفْرَاءُ فَاقِعٌ لَوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ النَّاظِرِينَ

*qālu 'd'u la-nā rabba-ka yubayyin la-nā mā launu-hā qāla inna-hū
yaqūlu inna-hā baqaratun ṣafrā'u fāqi'un launu-hā tasurru 'l-nāẓirīna*

They said: 'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what colour it should be.' He said: 'He says it shall be a golden cow, bright its colour, gladdening beholders.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLU 'D'U LA-NĀ RABBA-KA
YUBAYYIN LA-NĀ MĀ LAUNU-HĀ QĀLA INNA-HU YAQŪLU
INNA-HĀ BAQARATUN ṢAFRĀ'U

§ Ṭabarī explains that this was another question whereby they displayed their obstinacy and their ignorant burdening of themselves with something which God had not sought to burden them with, this time about the colour of the cow, for God had not originally narrowed down their choice of cow by specifying its colour. As Ibn 'Abbās said [1183], this caused annoyance to their prophet. He also gives a reason for *laun* (= colour) being in the nominative.

[T]: «ṢAFRĀ»: FIRST OPINION: Some said that it means 'black, of great blackness' [⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1218, 1219].

SECOND OPINION: Others said that it means 'with yellow horns and hooves' [⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1220; ⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair, 1222].

§ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī also said that it meant that the cow was wild [1221].

ṬABARĪ'S COMMENTS: I assume that the one who said about «ṣafrā'» that it meant 'black' was thinking of those who say when describing black camels that they are yellow (*ṣufr*). But 'the Arabs' only say this about camels because their blackness is tinged with yellow,‡ . . . but they do not describe cows like this. Moreover, the Arabs do not qualify blackness with brightness (*fuqū'*); when they want to say it is intense, they qualify it with darkness (*ḥulūka*) and the suchlike, and say: 'It is pitch-black (*ḥālīk*, *ḥānik*, *ḥulkūk*, or *ghirbīb*, *dajūjī*)'. They do not say: 'It is bright black (*aswad fāqi'*)'; they only say:

'It is bright yellow (*aṣfar fāqi'*)'. So the qualification 'of the 'yellow' as 'bright (*fāqi'*)' 'in this verse' is a clear proof against the interpretation of those who interpret . . . «ṣafrā' fāqi'» to mean 'dark black'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FĀQI'UN LAUNU-HĀ

It means its colour is pure. *Fuqū'* in relation to yellow is like *nuṣū'* in relation to white, which is brightness and purity. [⇒ Qatāda, 1225; ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1226; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1227; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1228; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 1230]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«'F'āqi'un launu-hā»: of a bright yellow colour, its yellowness shading into white.¹ [1229]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF TASURRU 'L-NĀẒIRĪNA

By His words «gladdening beholders» He means that this cow amazes those who gaze upon it by its beautiful physical structure, appearance and form. [⇒ Qatāda, 1231; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1233]

⇒ Wabḥ:

When you gaze upon it, it gives you the impression that the rays of the sun are emanating from its hide. [1232]

¹ M. Shākir (Sh. & Sh., II, 202, n. 1) tentatively suggests that Ṭabarī objects to this interpretation, that it is not a bright yellow which is white, but rather a light yellow.

قَالُوا أَذْعُ لَنَا رَبِّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ الْبَقَرَ تَشَبَهَ
عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَمُهْتَدُونَ

*qālu 'd'u la-nā raḥba-ka yubayyin la-nā mā hiya inna 'l-baqara
tashābaha 'alay-nā wa-in-nā in shā'a 'llāhu la-muhtadūna*

They said: 'Pray to your Lord for us, that He may make clear to us what it should be; cows look alike to us; and, if God will, we shall then be guided.'

§ Ṭabarī summarizes the story of the sacrifice of the cow so far from v. 68, saying that there is now no mention of Moses because the context makes it clear to whom the people were asking these troublesome questions, by which they burdened themselves with difficulties they could have avoided.

Because the people increased the harm to their prophet Moses and their annoyance of him, God increased their punishment and the pressure 'on them'.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

If they had taken the nearest cow it would have been enough for them, but they pressed relentlessly on 'with their questions', so God was hard with them. [1235. See also ⇒ 'Abīda al-Salmānī, 1236-8; ⇒ Mujāhid 1240, 1241; ⇒ Ibn Juraij, reporting from Mujāhid, 'Aṭā', and Muḥammad, 1242; ⇒ Qatāda, from Muḥammad, 1244; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 1247]

⇒ 'Ikrima:

If the Children of Israel had taken a 'ny' cow it would have sufficed them, and if they had not said: «'A'nd, if God will, we shall thus be guided'» they would not have found it. [1239. See also ⇒ Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1243]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

If they had taken any cow and sacrificed it, it would have sufficed them, but they pressed relentlessly on 'with their questions' and annoyed Moses, so God was hard with them. [1245]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

If the people—i.e., the Children of Israel—had looked for any nearby cow, it would have sufficed them, but they pressed relentlessly on 'with their questions', and He was hard on them, and they bought it with a sum of dinars which filled its hide. [1246]

§ Ṭabarī embarks here upon a technical discussion concerning the topic of 'generality and specificity (*al-'umūm wa 'l-khuṣūṣ*)'. This is one of the topics in the science of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), the science which deals with the principles which govern the extraction of the rulings of the religious law from the sources of the law, e.g., from the scripture. Ṭabarī points out that all the authorities he quotes agree that when the Children of Israel were first commanded to sacrifice a cow their obligation was to sacrifice any cow, and that it was therefore wrong of them to ask for a particular kind of cow to be specified. Their duty, he deduces, was to act according to the ostensive command and sacrifice any cow they wished. In other words, they should have acted according to the generality of the ostensive text. When they received a reply to their first request for details about the cow, their position with respect to their duty changed, and they should then have acted in accordance with the generality of the new ostensive ruling, which was to sacrifice any middle-aged cow. As before, it was wrong of them to ask for a further specification. And so on with the subsequent questions: they were, in effect, given each time a new command, and each time they were in a different position and had a different obligation. The point that Ṭabarī wants to make, and which, he says, is confirmed by all the authorities whose Traditions he has quoted, is that a ruling in a verse from God's scripture is general and follows the ostensive meaning of the text; there is no more specific ruling contained within it, as it were, waiting to be inferred or discovered. There is no obligation to do anything which is not ostensively indicated. The corollary, which he then deduces from this, is that when something in the ostensive, general command is subsequently specified—by another revelation or by something the Messenger says—a new ruling has been made, and a new duty created, which was not part of, or contained in the old ruling. The old ruling remains in its ostensive generality, and the new ruling comes into existence with its new generality. This opinion, which Ṭabarī says that he has explained in a book he wrote called the *Kitāb al-Risāla*, is in opposition to the view which says that when a part of a ruling in a verse in the revelation is subsequently made specific, the ruling itself becomes specific concerning that part which has been specified.

On the basis of this, Ṭabarī rejects the suggestion that the Children of Israel asked these questions out of religious zeal, supposing that a specific cow was intended and that they had to find out what it was; for this suggestion in effect

claims that they believed God could command them to do something without explaining what it was. In that case, they would have been asking God to impose an obligation on them, and this, Ṭabarī says, is something which even a mad person cannot be conceived doing.

As for His words «inna 'l-baqara tashābaha 'alay-nā», *baqar* is the plural of *baqara*.

(...)

The interpretation of «*tashābaha 'alay-nā*» is 'cows' are confusing for us'.

§ Ṭabarī cites the variant readings *tashshābahu* and *yashshābahu* (which are present tense forms of *ta:hābaha* with assimilation of the *t*-prefix to the first radical *sh*), and rejects them as contrary to the consensus of the authoritative reciters.

(...)

2: 71

قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقَرَةٌ لَا ذَلُولَ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا
تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلَّمَةٌ لَا شِيَةَ فِيهَا قَالُوا لَأَنُكِنَّ جُنَّتْ
بِالْحَقِّ فَذَبَحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

*qāla inna-hu yaqūlu inna-hā baqaratun lā dhulūlun tuthīru 'l-arḍa
wa-lā tasqi 'l-ḥartha musallamatun lā shiyata fī-hā qālu 'l-āna ji'ta
bi-'l-ḥaqqi fa-dhabahū-hā wa-mā kādū yaf'alūna*

He said: 'He says it shall be a cow not broken to work the land or to water the tillage, kept safe, with no blemish on her.' They said: 'Now you have brought the truth'; and therefore they sacrificed it, although they almost did not.

THE INTERPRETATION OF QĀLA INNA-HU YAQŪLU
INNA-HĀ BAQARATUN LĀ DHULŪLUN TUTHĪRU 'L-ARḌA
WA-LĀ TASQI 'L-ḤARTHA

¶ MOSES said: 'God says that the cow which I have commanded you to sacrifice is an unbroken (*dhalūl*) cow'—and by 'unbroken' He means that it has not been broken in to labour, so it is a cow which has not been broken in to tilling (*ithāra*) the earth with its hooves, nor has it been made to draw up water and irrigate the crops . . . [⇒ Qatāda, 1248, 1253; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1249; ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1250; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1251; ⇒ Mujāhid, 1252]—'to turn over the earth for cultivation.' . . .

'God' described 'the cow' thus because it was wild, according to what has been said [⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1254 (= 1221)].

THE INTERPRETATION OF MUSALLAMATUN

The meaning of *masallama* (=kept safe) is derived from *salāma* (=safety). . . .

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

«*Musallama*» means 'kept safe from blemish', and «with no blemish on it» means 'no white or black on it'. [1255-7]

SECOND OPINION: Others said 'it means' 'kept safe from physical defects' [⇒Qatāda, 1258, 1259; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1260; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1261; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1262]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: What Ibn 'Abbās, Abu 'l-'Āliya, and those who said the same as they did, said in interpreting this is a preferable interpretation of the verse to Mujāhid's, because, if its being kept safe was 'being kept free' of other colours apart from the colour of its hide, it would have been superfluous, having said «*musallama*», to say «with no blemish on it». His words «with no blemish on it» make it clear that the meaning of «*musallama*» is different from the meaning of «with no blemish on it». This being so, the meaning of the passage is: 'He says that it is a cow which has not been broken in to tilling the land and turning it over for cultivation, nor has it been made to draw up water for the fields; moreover, it is healthy and has been kept free from physical defects.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *LĀ SHIYATA FĪ-HĀ*

¶ «with no blemish on it»: With no colour on it differing from the colour of its hide.

The original meaning 'of *shiya*' comes from *washy* which means 'to embellish the flaws which are on a garment by embroidering different colours into the warp and weft of the fabric.' . . . From this comes the word *wāshin* 'which is used' for someone who slanders a man to the ruler or someone else, because of his false representation of him to him and his embellishment of his lie with idle talk. . . .

Shiya is from *washaya*, because the *wa-* at the beginning is dropped and replaced with an *hā'* (*tā' marbūṭa*) at the end.

§ Ṭabarī cites several Traditions which confirm the interpretation he gives. [⇒Qatāda, 1263, 1264; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1265; ⇒Mujāhid, 1266, 1267 (see above 1255-7); ⇒Aṭiya, 1268; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1279; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1280; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1281]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *QĀLU 'L-ĀNA JI'TA BI-'L-ḤAQQI*

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that it means: 'Now you

have explained the truth to us. We have found out what it is, and we know which cow you meant.' [⇒Qatāda, 1282]

SECOND OPINION: Some of them said: This is God reporting about the people that they accused God's prophet, Moses, of not bringing them the truth about the cow before that.

⇒Ibn Zaid:

They needed a cow whose qualities apart from this—that it was golden with no black or white in it—they did not know. They said: 'This is the cow of so-and-so. «Now you have brought the truth.» By God, he had brought them the truth before that. [1283]

§ Ṭabarī prefers the first interpretation, on the grounds that it is more consistent with the Qur'ānic text. He adds, however, that the people committed an act of insolence and ignorance against Moses in implying that he had not told them the truth before.

In the past an interpreter had claimed that by saying «'Now you have brought the truth'» the people had become unbelievers, accusing Moses of having lied to them. Ṭabarī does not accept this, because the fact that the people submitted and sacrificed the cow shows that they obeyed God, although what they said showed their ignorance and their error.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-DHABAḤŪ WA-MĀ KĀDŪ YAF'ALŪNA*

. . . By His words «*wa-mā kādū yaf'alūna*» He means that they almost failed to sacrifice it and abandoned the duty God had imposed on them in this.

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said: The reason 'that they almost omitted the duty which God had imposed upon them concerning the sacrifice' was the excessive cost of the cow they had been commanded to sacrifice and whose description had been explained to them. [⇒Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Quraẓī, 1274, 1275; ⇒Mujāhid, Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Quraẓī, and Muḥammad b. Qais, 1276 (where it is stated that the price was the animal's hide filled with gold which had belonged to the murdered man)]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

'This' . . . means 'that' they almost did not do it (*kādū lā yaf'alūna*) and what they wanted did not happen, for they wanted not to

sacrifice it. Everything in the Qur'ān 'about which it is said' *kāda* or *kādū* (=it/they almost . . .) or *law* (=the hypothetical 'if') did not happen; this is as 'in' His words «*akādu ukhfi-hā* (=I almost hid it 'but did not')» (20: 15). [1277]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that they almost did not do this out of fear of the scandal 'that would ensue' if God made clear who had murdered the dead man about whom they had quarrelled before Moses.

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The correct interpretation in our view is that the people almost did not do what God had commanded them to do by sacrificing the cow for both these reasons: the first being the excessive price, despite what has been mentioned to us about its small worth and low value; and the other is the fear of the great scandal they would incur when God disclosed the murderer to his prophet, Moses.

As for the excessive price, a variety of Traditions have been reported to us concerning this [e.g., ⇒Al-Suddī, 1278 (ten times its weight in gold); ⇒'Abīda, 1279, ⇒Wahb, 1282, and ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1283 (its hide full of dinars); ⇒Mujāhid, 1280, 1281 (its hide full of gold)].

As for its small worth and low value:

⇒'Ikrima:

Its price was only three dinars. [1288]

As for what we have said about their fear of the scandal they would incur:

⇒Wahb b. Munabbih:

When the people were commanded to sacrifice the cow, they said to Moses «'Do you take us in jest?'», because they knew that they would be exposed when it was sacrificed; so they were averse to sacrificing it. [1289]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

After God had revived the dead man and he had informed them about his murderer, the killers denied having killed him, and said: 'By God, we did not kill him', after they had seen the sign and the truth. [1290]

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وَإِذْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَادَرَأْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنْتُمْ
تَكْتُمُونَ

*wa-idh qataltum nafsan fa-'ddāra'tum fī-hā wa-'llāhu mukhrijun mā
kuntum taktumūna*

And when you killed a soul, and disputed about it—and God disclosed what you were hiding—

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH QATALTUM NAFSAN
FA-'DDĀRA'TUM FĪ-HĀ*

BY His words «And when you killed a soul» He means: And remember, O Children of Israel, when you killed a soul. And the «soul» which they killed was the soul whose story we have mentioned in the interpretation of 2: 67

His words «*fa-'ddāra'tum fī-hā*» mean 'and you were at variance about it' [⇒Mujāhid, 1292, 1293], 'and you contended with one another about it' [⇒Ibn Zaid, 1295]. . . .

Iddāra'tum is originally *tadāra'tum*, but the *tā*' is close in pronunciation to the *dāl*, that is to say that *tā*' is pronounced with the tip of the tongue and the base of the two lips, and the *dāl* is pronounced with the tip of the tongue and the tips of the teeth, so the *tā*' is assimilated to the *dāl*, and they become a double *dāl*. . . .

(...)

⇒Ibn Juraij:

«And when you killed a soul, and disputed about it»: some of them said: 'You killed him', and the others said: 'You killed him.' [1294]

And they disputed about the soul whom they had killed.

⇒Mujāhid:

The man of the 'story of the' cow was one of the Children of Israel, and a man killed him and dumped him at the door of some other people. Then the relatives of the murdered man came and

accused them of his blood, and they denied it (*intaḡū*)—or claimed they were innocent of it (*intaḡalū*), Abū 'Āṣim 'one of the transmitters' was not sure. [1296]

⇒Qatāda:

There was a murdered man among the Children of Israel, and each tribe from them accused another of it, until the evil among them reached a dangerous degree, so that they took their case before God's prophet. Then God revealed to Moses: 'Slaughter a cow and smite 'the murdered man' with a part of it.' It has been mentioned to us that his relative who was seeking to avenge his blood was the one who had killed him on account of the inheritance between them. [1298]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

There was an old man from the Children of Israel in Moses' time who was very wealthy, and his nephews were poor and had no property. The old man had no son, and his nephews were his heirs. They said: 'If only our uncle would die and we could inherit his wealth!' When their uncle took too long for them to die, Satan came to them and said: 'Why do you not kill your uncle, inherit his wealth, and claim blood-money from the people of the town in which you do not live?'—that is to say, there were two towns, and they lived in one of them; whenever someone was murdered and dumped between the two towns, the distance between the dead man and the two towns would be measured and the blood-money would be claimed from the one he was nearest to. When Satan had talked them into this, and their uncle's death had taken too long for them, they went to him and killed him, and then they went and dumped him at the gate of the town in which they did not live. When the people of the town woke up in the morning, the nephews of the old man came and said: 'Our uncle has been murdered at the gate of your town. By God, you shall pay us our uncle's blood-money.' The people of the town said: 'We swear by God that we did not kill him, nor do we know who killed him. We did not open the gate of our town after it had been bolted until we woke up in the morning.' And they went to Moses, and when they arrived the nephews of the old man said: 'We found our uncle murdered at the gate of their town.' And the people of the town said: 'We swear by God that we did not kill

him, and we did not open the gate of the town once we had bolted it until we got up in the morning.' And Gabriel brought a command to Moses from our Lord, the All-hearing, the Omniscient, saying: 'Say to them that God commands them to sacrifice a cow and to smite 'the murdered man' with a part of it.' [1299. See also a similar Tradition containing the intertwined narratives of Mujāhid, Muḡammad b. Ka'b al-Quraṡī, and Muḡammad b. Qais, 1300; also ⇒'Abīda, 1131, ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1302]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'LLĀHU MUKHRIJUN MĀ KUNTUM TAKTUMŪNA

¶ And God disclosed what you were concealing about the death of the murdered man whom you killed and then disputed about.

Ikhrāj (=lit., to bring out, e.g., into the open) 'is used' in this place 'to' mean 'divulge', 'disclose' . . . as 'it does in what' God said 'elsewhere': «so that they do not prostrate themselves to God, who discloses (*yukhriju*) what is hidden in the heavens and the earth.» (27: 27)

(...)

فَقُلْنَا أَضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَلِكَ يُخَيِّ اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَى وَيُرِيكُمْ
آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

*fa-qulna 'dribū-hu bi-ba'di-hā ka-dhālika yuḥyi 'llāhu 'l-mautā
wa-yurī-kum āyāti-hi la'alla-kum ta'qilūna*

so We said: 'Smite him with part of it'; thus does God bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs so that you may understand.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-QULNA 'DRIḤŪ-HU BI-BA'DI-HĀ*

¶ So We said to the people of Moses who disputed about the murder—whose affair we have previously described—: 'Smite the murdered man «with part of it»'—i.e., with part of the cow which God had commanded them to sacrifice.

[T]: «PART OF IT»: FIRST OPINION: Some said the murdered man was smitten with the thigh.

⇒ Mujāhid:

He was smitten with the thigh of the cow and then stood up alive. Then he said: 'So-and-so murdered me.' Then he returned to his 'state of' death. [1305, 1306, 1308; also ⇒ 'Ikrima, 1307, ⇒ Qatāda, 1309, 1310]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that what he was smitten with was the piece of flesh which is between the shoulder-blades. [⇒ Al-Suddī, 1311]

THIRD OPINION: Others said that what they were commanded to smite him with was one of its bones. [⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1312]

FOURTH OPINION

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

They smote the murdered man with some of its limbs (*ārāb*), and behold, he stood up. They said: 'Who murdered you?' He said:

'My nephew.' (...) He had murdered him and dumped him on that tribe desiring to take his blood-money. [1313]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The correct interpretation . . . in our view is: God commanded them to smite the murdered man with part of the cow so that the smitten man would revive. And there is no indication in the verse, nor 'in' any authoritative Tradition as to which part of it the people were commanded to smite the murdered man with. It is possible that . . . 'it' was the thigh, . . . or the tail, or the cartilage from the shoulder, or any other part of it. There is no harm in not knowing what the murdered man was smitten with, nor is there any advantage in knowing, besides the confirmation that the people smote the murdered man with a part of the cow after they had sacrificed it and God had brought him 'back' to life.

QUESTION: What is the meaning of the command to smite the murdered man with a part of 'the cow'?

REPLY: So that he could be revived to inform God's prophet, Moses, and those who disputed about it, who had killed him.

QUESTION: Where is the report that God commanded them to do this for this reason?

REPLY: This was omitted because the indication from what was mentioned in the passage sufficed to point to it, in the same way as 'in' the similar 'examples of ellipsis' which we have previously mentioned.

¶ So We said: 'Smite him with a part of 'the cow' so that he will revive'; and they smote him, and he revived.

This is like His words «Strike the sea with your staff'; and it clave», meaning: So he struck it and it clave. The proof of this is His words: «thus does God bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs so that you may have understanding.»

THE INTERPRETATION OF *KA-DHĀLIKA YUḤYI 'LLĀHU
'L-MAUTĀ*

'These words' . . . are addressed by God to His believing servants, and 'in them He' remonstrates against the polytheists who deny the Resurrection. He commanded them to take a lesson from what He did

when He revived the murdered man of the Children of Israel after he had died in this world. He said to them: 'O you who deny the Resurrection after death, take heed from My revivification of this murdered man after his death, that, just as I revived him in this world, I shall revive the dead after they have died, and awaken them on the Day of the Resurrection.

God thereby advanced his argument with the polytheists among the Arabs, who were an illiterate people with no scripture, because those of the Children of Israel who had knowledge of this lived among them. And this verse descended among them, and God thereby informed them of this, so that they would seek to acquaint themselves with the knowledge possessed by those who were among them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YURĪ-KUM ĀYĀTI-HI
LA'ALLA-KUM TA'QILŪNA

¶ And God shows you His signs which 'Muḥammad' brought from God, O unbelievers who give Muḥammad and what he brought from God the lie—and His signs are His signs and proofs which demonstrate his prophethood—so that you may realize and understand that he is telling the truth; so believe in him and follow him.

2:74

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ
أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِنْ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ
وَإِنْ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقَّقُ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنْ مِنْهَا لَمَا
يَهْبِطُ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

*thumma qasat qulūbu-kum min ba'di dhālika fa-hiya ka-'l-hijārati aw
ashaddu qaswatan wa-inna mina 'l-hijārati la-mā yatafajjaru min-hu
'l-anhāru wa-inna min-hā la-mā yashshaqqaqu fa-yakhruju min-hu
'l-mā'u wa-inna min-hā la-mā yahbiṭu min khashyati 'llāhi wa-ma
'llāhu bi-ghāfilin 'am-mā ta'malūna*

Then your hearts became hardened thereafter, and they 'became' like stones, or harder; for there are stones from which rivers gush forth, and others split so that water flows from them, and others crash down in dread of God. And God is not heedless of the things you do.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA QASAT QULŪBU-KUM
MIN BA'DI DHĀLIKA

By this He means the unbelievers of the Children of Israel, and they, according to what was mentioned, were the nephews of the murdered man.

¶ 'Then their hearts' became dry, coarse, and rough,‡ after He had revived for them the murdered man—about whose murder they had disputed—and 'after' he had informed them of his murderer, and the reason for which he had murdered him, . . . and 'after' God, by his report, had put an end to the argument between those who were telling the truth and those who were not.

The hardness of their hearts, by which God described them, was, according to what has reached us, their denial of having killed the

murdered man whom God had revived. Then He informed the Children of Israel that they were his murderers, after 'the murdered man' had told them this, and after his second death.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

When the murdered man had been smitten by part of it—i.e., by part of the cow—he sat up alive and it was said to him: 'Who killed you?' And he said: 'My nephews killed me.' Then he died. And his nephews said, when he had died: 'By God, we did not kill him.' And they denied the truth, after they had seen it. And God said: «Then your hearts became hardened thereafter»—i.e., 'the hearts of' the nephews of the old man—«and they 'became' like stones, or harder». [1314; see also ⇒ Qatāda, 1315]

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-HIYA KA-'L-ḤIJĀRATI
AW ASHADDU QASWATAN

¶ Then, after you had seen the truth so that it had become clear to you and you had recognized it, your hearts hardened against submitting to it and against conceding the necessity of God's truth 'when it faced' you; and your hearts were callous, arid, coarse, and harsh, like stones, «or harder»—meaning that their hearts were more callous than stones against submitting to the necessity of God's truth against them, and against conceding to Him the unavoidability of His rights against them.

OBJECTION: What is the signification of His saying «and they 'became' like stones, or harder», when 'or (*aw*)', among those who speak Arabic, is used in talking to mean doubt, while there can be no doubt in God's statement?

REPLY: This does not signify what you imagine it does . . . , rather it is a statement about their hard hearts, that they were . . . hard like stones, or more solid than stones, in their view and the view of those who knew about them.

§ Ṭabarī gives the views of several anonymous Arabic experts about this use of 'or (*aw*)'. One said, quoting other examples from the Qur'ān—37: 147 and 34: 24—and poetry, that in these cases the speaker is well aware of which of the two things is true, though he says it in this way so as to create a feeling of vagueness in whoever is being addressed. Another said that this verse had an

inclusive meaning, by which he meant that some of their hearts were callous like stones, and some were even more callous, giving as an example the sentence 'I gave you only sweet things or sour things to eat', meaning nothing but these two things. Another said it meant 'and', just as it would do in a negative sentence like «and obey not one of them, sinner or unbeliever» (76: 24), and another, also quoting 37: 147, said it meant 'even 'harder''. Finally, another said that it meant 'they were like stones, or harder in your case.' Ṭabarī says there are grounds in Arabic speech for all these views, although he prefers the interpretation he gave first, and those which preserve the basic meaning of *aw* signifying an alternative. He then gives reasons for *ashaddu* being in the nominative.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-INNA MINA 'L-ḤIJĀRATI
LA-MĀ YATAFAJJARU MIN-HU 'L-ANHĀRU

¶ For there are some stones from which water gushes forth from which rivers come.

By the mention of 'rivers' He dispensed with mentioning 'water'. . . . *Tafajjur* (= gushing forth) . . . 'is used' when water comes down from its source. 'The VIIth form verb from the same root' *infajara* (= to burst forth) is used for every fluid which spurts up when it comes from its place, be it water, blood, pus, or anything else.‡

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-INNA MIN-HĀ LA-MĀ
YASHSHAQQAQU FA-YAKHRUJU MIN-HU 'L-MĀ'U

¶ And there are some stones which . . . develop fissures—'the verb is' *yatashaqqaqu*, but the *tā* (-t-) is assimilated with the *shīn* (-sh-) and becomes a double *shīn* (-shsh-)—so that they become welling springs and flowing rivers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-INNA MIN-HĀ LA-MĀ YAHBIṬU
MIN KHASHYATI 'LLĀHI

¶ And some stones crash down—i.e., tumble down from the tops of mountains to the earth and 'to' the feet of the mountains—out of fear and dread of God.¹

God described the stones 'thus' . . . , after making them a similitude for those Children of Israel whose hardness of heart He reported, absolving 'the stones', but not the Children of Israel whose hardness of

heart He reported, from any guilt. For, according to God's description of them, they gave His Messengers the lie and denied His signs after He had shown them the signs and warnings and after they had seen the wonders of the indicants and proofs, despite the sound minds which He had given them and the healthy souls He had blessed them with, which He had not given stones and clods of earth. Moreover, despite that, there are those 'stones' from which rivers gush forth, those from which water flows, and those which crash down in dread of God. So He stated that there are stones which are more malleable than their hearts towards the truth to which they are summoned. [=Ibn Ishāq, 1316]

§ Tabarī then quotes Traditions [=Mujāhid, 1317, 1318; =Qatāda, 1319, 1320; =Ibn 'Abbās, 1321; =Ibn Jurāij, 1322] which support his exegesis of the stones being more deserving of pardon than the Children of Israel. He then cites a variety of opinions about the significance of the crashing down of the stones, but he does not take them into account on the grounds that they are at variance with the interpretation of the most prominent interpreters.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MA 'LLĀHU BI-GHĀFILIN
'AM-MĀ TA' MALŪNA

¶ O you Children of Israel and Jewish rabbis who give His signs the lie, and deny the prophethood of His Messenger, Muḥammad, and say baseless things about him, God is not heedless of your malicious deeds and vile acts; rather, He charges them against you, so as to requite you for them in the Hereafter or punish you for them in this world.

The original meaning of *ghafla* is to abandon something because one is inattentive to, and forgetful of it. . . .

¹ For *habaṣa*, see *Exeg.* 2: 36, p. 257, and *Exeg.* 2: 61, p. 350.

١٧١

أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ
كَلِمَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

*a-fa-taṭma'ūna an yu'minū la-kum wa-qad kāna farīqun min-hum
yasma'ūna kalāma 'llāhi thumma yuḥarrifūna-hu min ba'di mā
'aqaḷū-hu wa-hum ya'lamūna*

Do you then hope for them to believe you, when there is a party of them who heard God's speech and then altered it after they had comprehended it, wittingly?

THE INTERPRETATION OF A-FA-TAṬMA' ŪNA
AN YU' MIN Ū LA-KUM

¶ O Companions of Muḥammad—i.e., O believers in Muḥammad, and testifiers to the truth of what He brought you from God—do you expect the Jews of the Children of Israel to believe you [=Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1326; =Qatāda, 1327], to affirm your veracity concerning what your prophet, Muḥammad, brought you from your Lord.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-QAD KĀNA
FARĪQUN MIN-HUM

Farīq (= party), like *ṭā'ifa* (= group), is a plural with no singular derived from it. It is of the form *fa'īl* from 'the Vth form verb' *tafarrāqa* (= to be divided). It names a collective, just as *ḥizb* (= party), from 'the Vth form verb' *taḥazzaba* (= to make common cause), names a group, and so forth.‡

§ Tabarī points out that the pronoun 'them' refers to the Children of Israel in general, from the time of Moses and onwards, although they are being included here, as ancestors, among the Jews contemporary with Muḥammad who have just been mentioned.¹

THE INTERPRETATION OF *YASMA' ŪNA KALĀMA 'LLĀHI*
THUMMA YUḤARRIFŪNA-HU MIN BA'DI MĀ 'AQALŪ-HU
WA-HUM YA' LAMŪNA

[T]: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

«Do you then hope for them to believe you, when there is a party of them who heard God's speech and then altered it after they had comprehended it, wittingly?» Those who altered it and kept it secret were the learned among them. [1328, 1329]

⇒ Ibn Zaid, concerning «they¹ heard God's speech and then altered it»:

«This means¹ the Torah which He sent down to them; they altered it: they made what was licit in it illicit, and what was illicit in it licit, and the truth in it false, and the false in it true. When the one in the right came to them with a bribe, they took out God's scripture for him, but when the one making false claims came to them with a bribe, they took out that «altered¹ scripture for him, and he was «found to be¹ truthful therein. And if someone came and asked them something in which was no truth, no bribe, nothing, they would command him to the truth. And «God¹ said to them «Will you bid the people to piety and forget yourselves, while you recite the scripture? Do you not understand?» (2: 44) [1331]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas¹, concerning this verse:

They heard this like the prophets heard; then they altered it after they had understood it, wittingly. [1332]

⇒ Muḥammad b. Ishāq:

It has reached us from one of the learned that they said to Moses: 'O Moses, something prevents us from seeing God, so make us hear his speech when He talks to you.' So Moses asked this of his Lord, and He said: 'Indeed, so command them to purify themselves, and to purify their clothes, and to fast.' And they did. Then he went forth with them until they came to Mount Sinai. When the overcast covered them, Moses commanded them to prostrate, and they fell down prostrating. His Lord spoke with

him, and they heard His speech, commanding him and forbidding him, so that they understood what they heard. Then he went back with them to the Children of Israel. When they came «back¹ a party of them altered what He had commanded them, and, when Moses said to the Children of Israel: 'God has commanded you to do such-and-such', this group whom God mentioned said: 'In fact, He said such-and-such', the opposite of what God had told them. It is they whom God meant «when He revealed this¹ to His Messenger, Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. [1333]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The best of the two interpretations we have quoted for this verse, the closest to what the ostensive reading indicates, is what al-Rabī' b. Anas said, and what Ibn Ishāq related from one of the learned. . . . «This means¹ that God stated that it was a group of those who heard God's speech who did the altering, «thereby¹ stressing the gravity of the lie they brought, after He had confirmed the proof and demonstration for them; and He notified His believing servants of the vanity of their hopes about the faith of their surviving descendants in the truth, light, and guidance which Muḥammad had brought them. Thus He said to them:

¶ «How can you expect these Jews to affirm your truthfulness, when you inform them by what you tell them of the reports from God of something invisible which they have not witnessed or seen? Some of them heard from God His command and prohibition, then changed it and altered it and denied it. Those of their surviving descendants who are among you are more likely to deny the truth you have brought them, not having heard it from God but only from you; and it is more probable that they will alter the qualities and description of your prophet, Muḥammad, in their scriptures, and change them wittingly, and then deny him and give him the lie. «They are more likely to do this¹ than their predecessors who heard the speech of God directly from God; they altered it after they had understood it and known it, intentionally altering it.

§ Ṭabarī discounts the first opinion on the grounds that if «who heard God's speech» had meant «who heard the Torah», it would have applied to those who did not alter it as well as to those who did.

. . . God states that they «altered it¹ . . . in «full¹ knowledge of the

interpretation of what they altered, which was opposite to what they changed it to.

¶ «They altered it after they had comprehended it»—after they had understood its interpretation—«wittingly»—knowing that in their alteration of the part of it which they altered they were uttering nonsense and lying.

For similar usages, see also 2: 49 and 2: 64.

2: 76

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَا بِغَضِهم
إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ قَالُوا أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُم بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
لِيُحَاجُّوكُمْ بِهِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

*wa-idhā laqu 'lladhīna āmanū qālū āmannā wa-idhā khalā ba'du-hum
ilā ba'din qālū a-tuḥaddithūna-hum bi-mā fataḥa 'llāhu 'alay-kum
li-yuḥājjū-kum bi-hi 'inda rabbi-kum a-fa-lā ta'qilūna*

And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe'; and when they go into seclusion with one another, they say: 'Do you relate to them what God has revealed to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord? Have you no understanding?'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDHĀ LAQU 'LLADHĪNA ĀMANŪ
QĀLŪ ĀMANNĀ*

As for 'these' words of His, . . . they are a statement by God about those Jews of the Children of Israel concerning whose faith He had told the Companions of Muḥammad to give up all hope, those from whom a party had heard the speech of God and had then altered it after they had understood, wittingly. They it was who would meet those who believed in God and His Messenger, Muḥammad, and say: 'We believe'. . . . God states that they behaved in the same way as the hypocrites, and followed their way. [=Ibn 'Abbās, 1335, 1336]

There is another opinion about the interpretation of this reported from Ibn 'Abbās:

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe', i.e., 'in your master, the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, although he is special to you'. [1337]

(. . .)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDHĀ KHALĀ BA'DU-HUM ILĀ
BA'DIN QĀLŪ A-TUḤADDITHŪNA-HUM BI-MĀ FATAḤA 'LLĀHU
'ALAY-KUM LI-YUḤĀJJŪ-KUM BI-HI 'INDA RABBI-KUM
A-FA-LĀ TA'QILŪNA*

¶ When some of these Jews, whom God described, were alone with others, and were secluded from people other than themselves—and that 'means' a place where there was no one else but them—«they said»—i.e., they said to each other—«Do you relate to them what God has revealed to you?»

[T]: «WHAT GOD HAS REVEALED TO YOU»: FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«And when they go into seclusion with one another, they say: 'Do you relate to them what God has revealed to you?' He means 'what God has commanded you to do'; and the others say: 'We are only mocking and ridiculing them.' [1339]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe', i.e., 'in your master, the Messenger of God, although he is special to you.' And when they were alone with each other, they said: 'Do not tell the Arabs this, for you have been asking God for 'a prophet' to help 'you' against them, and 'the prophet He has sent' is one of them.' So God sent down: «And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe'; and when they go into seclusion with one another, they say: 'Do you relate to them what God has revealed to you, that they may thereby dispute with you

before your Lord?», meaning: 'You acknowledge that he is a prophet, and you know that the covenant for him was taken from you that you must follow him, and he tells them that he is the prophet whom we are awaiting and whom we find in our scripture. Deny him, and do not acknowledge to them that he is a prophet'. God says: «Do they not know that God knows what they keep secret and what they proclaim?» [1340. See also ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1341; ⇒ Qatāda, 1342, 1343, 1344]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ Mujāhid:

'This is what¹ the Jews of Banū Quraiza said when the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, cursed them as the brothers of apes and swine. They said: 'Who told you?'—This was when he sent 'Alī to them and they offended Muḥammad; so he said: 'O brothers of apes and swine.'¹ [1345, 1346, 1347]

FOURTH OPINION

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«They say: 'Do you relate to them'—the chastisement that—God has ruled (*fataḥa*) for you,² that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord?». They were people among the Jews who had believed and had then become hypocrites, and they had related to the believers among the Arabs what their chastisement would be. Then they said to each other: 'Do you relate to them the chastisement that God has ruled for you, so that they say: "We are more beloved by God than you, and dearer to God than you."» [1348]

FIFTH OPINION

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

When they were asked about something: 'Do you not know that such-and-such is in the Torah?', they would say: 'Yes, indeed'—(...) they were Jews. Then their leaders, to whom they turned, would say to them: 'Why did you tell them what God has sent down to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord? Have you no understanding?' (...) The Messenger of God said: 'Verily, none shall enter the walls of the city of Medina among us unless he is a believer.' So their leaders, who were

unbelievers and hypocrites, said: 'Go and say: "We believe", but be unbelievers when you come back.' (...) So they would come to Medina in the early morning and return to them after the afternoon prayer. (...) «There is a party of the people of scripture who say: 'Believe in what has been sent down to those who believe at the beginning of the day and disbelieve at the end of it so that they might return'» (3: 72). And when they entered Medina they would say: 'We are Muslims', in order to find out the news and the situation of the Messenger of God, but when they returned, they returned to unbelief. When God informed His prophet about them, he stopped them from doing this, and they did not enter. The believers who were with the Messenger of God supposed they were believers, and said to them: 'Has God not said to you such-and-such?', and they would say: 'Yes.' But when they returned to their people, i.e., the leaders, they said: «Do you relate to them what God has revealed to you, that they may thereby dispute with you before your Lord? Have you no understanding?» [1349]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The original meaning of *fath* in the speech of the Arabs is 'deliverance', 'judgement', 'ruling'. It is used in supplications¹ to say 'O God, rule (*iftah*) between me and so-and-so',² and a judge in law¹ is called a *fattāḥ*. Thus God said: «O our Lord, give true deliverance (*iftah bi-l-ḥaqqi*) between us and our people; You are the best of deliverers.» (7: 89)

Since the meaning of *fath* is as we have described, it is clear that the meaning of 'this passage' . . . is: 'Do you relate to them what God has ruled for you and has decreed concerning you.' And part of God's ruling for them is that whereby in the Torah He took their compact of belief in Muḥammad and what he brought; and part of what He decreed concerning them is that He made from them apes and swine, and so forth. All this was a proof for the Messenger of God and those who believe in him against those Jews who give him the lie, who acknowledge the ruling of the Torah and 'His' other 'rulings and judgements'.

This being so, the best interpretation of the verse is, in our view, the opinion of him who said: This means: 'Do you relate to them what God has revealed (*fataḥ*) to you about the sending of Muḥammad to His creatures?', for, in the first part of this verse, God narrated the statement about their saying to the Messenger of God and his

Companions: 'We believe in what Muḥammad brought', and it is best that the end 'of the verse' should correspond to the report with which it started.

In this case, it necessarily follows that they censured each other for what they disclosed to the Messenger of God and his Companions when they said to them: 'We believe in Muḥammad and what he has brought'. For they said this because they had found it in their scriptures, and they were informing the Companions of the Messenger of God of this. And they censured each other when they were alone for having told 'the Muslims' something which was a proof for the Muslims against them before their Lord. That is to say that they told 'the Muslims' about the existence of the description of Muḥammad in their scriptures, yet they disbelieved in him. So God's support which He granted the Muslims against the Jews, His ruling against them for 'the Muslims' in their Book, was that they should believe in Muḥammad when he was sent, but when he was sent they disbelieved in him, despite knowing about his prophethood.

'So' His words «'Have you no understanding?'» are a statement by God about the Jews who censured their brothers for telling the Companions of the Messenger of God what God had revealed to them, when they said to them: 'Do you not understand, O you people, that your telling the Companions of the Prophet that it is in your scriptures that he is the prophet who is sent as a proof for them against you before your Lord which they will bring as evidence against you?' That is to say: 'Do not do this; do not speak to them as you do; do not tell them what you have told them about this.' And God said: «Know they not that God knows what they keep secret and what they proclaim?»

¹ For the Prophet's raid against the Banū Quraiza, see Ibn Ishāq (1955), pp. 461 ff.

² See p. 407.

2:77

أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

a-wa-lā ya'lamūna anna 'llāha ya'lamu mā yusirrūna wa-mā yu'linūna

Know they not that God knows what they keep secret and what they proclaim?

¶ Do those Jews who censure their brothers from their own religious community . . . not know that God knows of their disbelief, their censure of each other, . . . which they keep secret and hide from the believers in their seclusion, and 'that He knows' that they hypocritically proclaim . . . to Muḥammad and his Companions when they meet them . . . : 'We believe in Muḥammad and what he brought', trying to deceive God, His Messenger, and the believers? [⇒Qatāda, 1350; ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1351]

2:78

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيٍّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

wa-min-hum ummīyūna lā ya'lamūna 'l-kitāba illā amānīya wa-in hum illā yazunnūna

And there are illiterate people among them, not knowing the scripture, but only falsehoods, merely conjecturing.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MIN-HUM UMMĪYŪNA

¶ AMONG these Jews whose story God narrated in these verses . . . [⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1352; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1353; ⇒Mujāhid, 1354], 'there are' «*ummīyūn*»—i.e., those who do not read or write, 'as in':

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'We are an illiterate people (*ummatun ummīyatun*) who do not write and are innumerate.' [1355]

(...)

⇒Ibrāhīm 'al-Nakha'ī:

Among them were those who could not (*lā yuḥsinu*) write. [1356]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

Illiterate Jews who did not read the scripture. [1357]

An opinion contrary to this opinion is narrated from Ibn 'Abbās:

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

Ummīyūn 'refers to' some people who did not believe in a prophet sent by God, nor in a scripture revealed by God; and they wrote a scripture with their own hands. Then they said to ignorant, common people: 'This is from God.'

(...) He stated that they wrote 'it' themselves, and then He called them *ummīyūn* because they rejected God's scriptures and Messengers.¹ [1358]

But this is an interpretation contrary to what is known about the common speech of the Arabs. That is to say that *ummī* among the Arabs is someone who cannot write.

I am of the opinion that an illiterate person is called *ummī*, relating him in his lack of ability to write to his mother (*umm*), because writing was something which men, and not women, did, so that a man who could not write and form letters was linked to his mother, and not to his father, in his ignorance of writing. . . .

Since the meaning of *ummī* in the speech of the Arabs is as we have described, the preferable interpretation of the verse is what al-Nakha'ī said

THE INTERPRETATION OF *LĀ YA'LAMŪNA 'L-KITĀBA ILLĀ AMĀNĪYA*

¶ Not knowing what was in the scripture sent down by God; not being aware of the limits, rulings, and duties which God had laid down in it; like beasts. [⇒Qatāda, 1359, 1360; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1361; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1362, 1363; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1363]

By «the scripture» He meant 'the Torah', and that is why it has a definite article, because a specific, well-known scripture is meant by it.

§ Of two interpretations he mentions for «but only falsehood (*illā amānīy*)»,

Ṭabarī prefers that of Ibn 'Abbās [1365] and Mujāhid [1366, 1367] which says that they did not understand anything of the scripture which God revealed to Moses, but invented lies and falsehoods. He supports this with evidence for this meaning of *amānīy* from a Tradition from 'Uthmān b. 'Affān. He rejects the interpretations according to which they recited the Torah without understanding, or that they understood what they wanted to understand, on the grounds that the end of the verse says that they conjectured and were not certain, and neither of these interpretations is consistent with this. In the first case, someone who recites something either understands nothing, or he does understand, in which case he knows; in neither instance is there doubt. Or, if he does not understand, he may still have doubts about the very nature of what he is reciting, but this was not the case with the Jews at the time of Muḥammad. In the second case, again, someone who understands only what he wants to understand still knows what he understands—he is not in a state of doubt. Knowledge and doubt, Ṭabarī affirms, are mutually exclusive terms. Moreover, he cites other verses of the Qur'ān and examples from poetry to show that the use of «*illā*» here means that 'the scripture', which they did not know, and their *amānīy*, were two things completely separate and different from each other. He also cites, but rejects, a variant reading *amānī*, without the doubling of the final *yā*.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IN HUM ILLĀ YUẒUNNŪNA*

§ Ṭabarī explains that the particle «*in*» here means 'not', and «*yazunnūna*» means 'they doubted and knew not the truth of it and whether it was correct'. Thus the phrase means:

¶ Among them were those who could neither read nor write, and who did not know the Book of God or what was in it, except by fabricating lies and falsehoods about God, conjecturing that they were correct in their lies and falsehoods. [⇒Mujāhid, 1374, 1375, 1376; ⇒Qatāda, 1378; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1379; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1380]

§ More specifically, it means that they were merely conjecturing when they rejected the prophethood of Muḥammad. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1377]

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 79, p. 413.

2:79

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ
عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ

*fa-wailun li-'lladhīna yaktubūna 'l-kitāba bi-aidī-him thumma
yaqūlūna hādihā min 'indi 'llāhi li-yashtarū bi-hi thamanan qalīlan
fa-wailun la-hum mim-mā katabat aidī-him wa-wailun la-hum mim-mā
yaksibūna*

So woe to those who write the scripture with their hands, then say: 'This is from God', that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-WAILUN

[T]: «FA-WAILUN/SO WOE»: FIRST OPINION

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«*Fa-wailun*» means: Chastisement will be upon them. [1381]

SECOND OPINION

⇒ Abū 'Iyād:

Wail is the pus that flows in the fundament of hell. [1392, 1393 (where it is the name of an infernal cistern of pus), 1394 (where it is the name of an infernal river of pus); see also ⇒ Shaqīq, 1385]

THIRD OPINION

⇒ 'Uthmān b. 'Affān:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: '*Wail* is a mountain in the Fire.' [1386]

⇒ Abū Sa'īd 'al-Khudrī:

Wail is a river in hell into which the unbeliever sinks for forty autumns before he reaches the bottom. [1387]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: According to the narrations from those whose opinions I have mentioned . . . , the meaning of the verse is:

¶ The chastisement—which is the drinking of pus by the inhabitants of Gehenna in the lowest part of hell—will be upon the Jews who wrote falsehood with their hands and then said: 'This is from God.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF LI-'LLADHĪNA YAKTUBŪNA
'L-KITĀBA BI-AIDĪ-HIM THUMMA YAQŪLŪNA HĀDHĀ
MIN 'INDI 'LLĀHI LI-YASHTARŪ BI-HI THAMANAN QALĪLAN

By this He means the Jews of the Children of Israel who altered God's scripture, and wrote a scripture according to their own interpretations, against what God had sent down to His prophet, Moses; and then sold it to a people who knew neither it nor what was in the Torah, being ignorant of what was in God's scriptures, seeking miserable goods from this world. So God says to them «So woe to those who write the scripture with their hands, . . . and woe to them for their earnings.» [⇒ Al-Suddī, 1388; ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1389, the continuation of 1358 above; ⇒ Mujāhid, 1390, 1391; ⇒ Qatāda, 1392, 1393; ⇒ Abū 'l-'Āliya, 1394 (they changed the description of Muḥammad that was in the Torah)]

⇒ 'Uthmān b. 'Affān:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: «So woe to those who write the scripture with their hands, . . . and woe to them for their earnings.» *Wail* is a mountain in the Fire; and it is what was sent down concerning the Jews because they altered the Torah, adding to it what they liked, and erasing from it what they did not like. And they erased the name of Muḥammad from the Torah. For this God was angry with them and took away part of the Torah, and said «So woe to those who write the scripture with their hands, . . . and woe to them for their earnings.» [1395, see 1386 above, which is a part of this]

(..)

§ Ṭabarī asks a hypothetical question as to why the text of the Qur'ān says «who write the scripture with their hands» when surely everybody writes with their hand. He replies that this clarifies the point that the learned Jews who altered the Torah did so in their own handwriting and in full knowledge of the enormity of their lies, and not by employing or delegating ignorant scribes to write it for them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-'VAILUN LA-HUM MIM-MĀ
KATABAT AIDĪ-HIM WA-WAILUN LA-HUM MIM-MĀ YAKSIBŪNA
(..)

¶ God says: 'Woe to them for' this which their hands have written, and woe to them also for what they have earned—i.e., for the sins they do, the offences they commit, and their illegal earnings, when they write what they have written with their hands contrary to what God sent down, . . . and sell it for a price . . . as being from God's scripture. [⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1397; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1398]

The original meaning of *kasb* is 'work', and whoever does any work, applying himself to it and plying it as a trade, is a *kāsib* in relation to the work. ‡

2:80

وَقَالُوا لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَةً قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى
اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

*wa-qālū lan tamassa-na 'l-nāru illā ayyāman ma'dūdatan qul a-
ttakhadhtum 'inda 'llāhi 'ahdan fa-lan yukhlifa 'llāhu 'ahda-hu am
taqūlūna 'ala 'llāhi mā lā ta'lamūna*

And they said: 'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days.' Say: 'Have you taken a covenant with God? God will not fail in His covenant; or do you say things against God of which you know nothing?'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-QĀLŪ LAN TAMASSA-NA 'L-NĀRU
ILLĀ AYYĀMAN MA'DŪDATAN

¶ «[T]HEY—the Jews—said: 'The Fire shall not touch us'—i.e., 'The Fire will not impinge upon our bodies, and we will not enter it—save a number of days.'»

«[A] number of (*ma'dūda*)» is used, and the number of 'days' is not explained in the revelation, because when God stated this about them, they knew the number of days to which they limited the time of their stay in the Fire. . . .

[T]: «A NUMBER OF DAYS»: FIRST OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

This was said by the enemies of God, the Jews. They said: 'God will only make us enter the Fire to expiate the oath, for the days during which we took the Calf: forty days. And when these days are over for us, the chastisement and the oath will be over for us.' [1399; see also ⇒Qatāda, 1400, 1403; ⇒'Ikrima, 1407; ⇒Al-Ḍahhāk, 1408]

⇒Al-Suddī:

The Jews said: 'God will make us enter the Fire and we shall stay there for forty days, until the Fire has consumed our sins and purified us. A herald will call out: "Come out every circumcised son of the Children of Israel", and that is why we have been commanded to be circumcised.' They said: 'None of us will be left in the Fire but that he will be brought out of it.' [1401]

(..)

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

It is mentioned that the Jews found written in the Torah that there is a journey of 40 years between the two ends of hell, until they reach the tree of Zaqqūm in the fundament of hellfire—Ibn 'Abbās used to say that hellfire (*jaḥīm*) was Saqar, and in it was the tree of Zaqqūm—. The enemies of God claimed that when the number, which they found in their scripture as a number of days, had elapsed—which only meant the journey which ended at the fundament of hellfire—. . . the appointed time would be at an end; there would be no chastisement and hell would perish and be destroyed. That is 'the meaning of' His words: «'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days'»—by that they meant the appointed time. (...) 'However,' when they burst through the gate of hell, they will progress through the chastisement till they reach the tree of Zaqqūm on the last of the numbered days. The keeper of hell will say to them: 'You claimed that the Fire would only touch you for a number of days! The number has elapsed,

and you are in eternity!' Then he will lead them into the torment of chastisement in hell, by which they will be overcome. [1404]

§ Other Traditions give the period as 'forty nights' [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1405; ⇒'Ikrima, 1406; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1409]

SECOND OPINION

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

The Jews used to say: 'The duration of this world is seven thousand years, and God will punish humanity on the Day of the Resurrection, one day of the period of the Hereafter for every thousand years of the lifetime of this world, and that is seven days.' Then God sent down concerning their words: «And they said: 'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days.' Say: 'Have you taken a covenant with God? God will not fail in His covenant; or do you say things against God of which you know nothing?'» [1410, 1411; also ⇒Mujāhid, 1412–14]

THE INTERPRETATION OF QUL A-TTAKHADHTUM 'INDA 'LLĀHI
'AHDAN FA-LAN YUKHLIFA 'LLĀHU 'AHDA-HU AM TAQŪLŪNA
'ALA 'LLĀHI MĀ LĀ TA 'LAMŪNA

When the Jews said «'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days'»—according to the interpretation of this which we have explained—God said to His prophet, Muḥammad: 'O Muḥammad, say to the community of the Jews: «"Have you taken a covenant with God?"'», i.e., 'Have you taken a compact with God for what you say about this? For God will not break His compact, nor will He change His promise and His contract. Or do you speak lies about God in ignorance, being insolent towards Him?' [⇒Mujāhid, 1415, 1416; see also ⇒Qatāda, 1417 ('Do you have a proof of this?'); ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1418]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

When the Jews said what they said, God said to Muḥammad: «Say: 'Have you taken a covenant with God?'», meaning: 'Have you stored away a covenant with God?' 'By the 'covenant' he meant: 'Have you said there is no god but Allāh, and not associated partners 'with Him' and not disbelieved in Him? If you have said it, you can thereby have hope, but if you have not said it,

why do you say about God that of which you have no knowledge?' 'This' means: 'If you had said there is no god but Allāh and had not associated anything with Him, and had then died in that 'state', you would have had a store with Me, and I would not have changed My promise to you that I shall requite you for it.' [1418]

⇒Al-Suddī:

When the Jews said what they said, God said: «Say: 'Have you taken a covenant with God? God will not fail in His covenant'». And He said in another place: «and the lies they forged have deluded them in their religion.» (3: 24) Then He gave an account of 'their' story, and said: «Not so; whoso earns evil . . . » [1419]

(...)

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بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ
أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

*balā man kasaba saiyyi'atan wa-aḥāṭat bi-hi khaṭī'atu-hu fa-ulā'ika
aṣḥābu 'l-nāri hum fī-hā khālīdūna*

Not so; whoso earns evil, and his transgression encompasses him—those are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever.

THE INTERPRETATION OF BALĀ MAN KASABA SAIYYI'ATAN

«NOT so; whoso earns evil» is God's saying that those Jews who said «'The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days'» are liars, and informing them that He will punish whoever associates 'others with God', whoever disbelieves in Him and His Messengers, and is surrounded by his sins; and He will make him dwell forever in the Fire. No one will dwell in the Garden except those who believe in Him and His Messenger, those who obey Him, and keep to His limits.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Not so; whoso earns evil, and his transgression encompasses him»—i.e., whoever does as you have done, and disbelieves as you have disbelieved such that his disbelief encircles what good he has done—«these are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever.» [1420]

(...)

As for the evil (*saiyi'a*) which God mentions in this place, it is associating 'partners' with God (*shirk*). [⇒ Abū Wā'il, 1421; ⇒ Mujāhid, 1422, 1423, 1427; ⇒ Qatāda, 1444, 1425; ⇒ 'Aṭā' al-Khurāsānī, 1427; ⇒ Al-Rabī', 1428]

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«Not so; whoso earns evil»; as for «evil», it is the sins for which God has promised the Fire. [1426]

... God means by «*saiyi'a*» some 'kinds of' evil and not other's, even though the ostensive meaning of 'the term' in the text is general, because God has decreed eternity in the Fire for its perpetrators. But it is the unbelievers in God who will dwell in the Fire forever, not the believers, because Traditions from the Messenger of God demonstrate that the believers will not dwell there forever, and that those who dwell there forever are the unbelievers in God and not the believers. And God has coupled His words «Not so; whoso earns evil, and his transgression encompasses him—those are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever» with His words «And those that believe, and do deeds of righteousness—those are the inhabitants of the Garden; there they shall dwell forever». Therefore it is clear that those evil-doers who will dwell forever in the Fire are not the believers who will dwell forever in the Garden. If someone should suppose that those believers who will dwell forever in the Garden are those who do deeds of righteousness and not those who do evil deeds, there are statements by God—that He will forgive our evil deeds, provided we avoid the major sins among those which He has prohibited us from, and cause us to go in through the munificent entrance—which make it known that what we have said about the interpretation of «Not so; whoso earns evil» is correct, i.e., that this means specifically some evil deeds and not others.

QUESTION: God has guaranteed us forgiveness for our evil deeds as long as we avoid the major sins among those He has prohibited us

from. What is the proof, then, that the major sins are not included in His words «Not so; whoso earns evil»?

REPLY: Since it is certain that the minor sins are not included in it, and that the meaning of the verse is particular and not general, it is established and certain that not anyone can judge and rule concerning any other on the basis of it, but only concerning someone about whom God has informed him by a proof from a Tradition which is decisive for whomever it reaches. And it has been established and proven true, by the testimony of all the Community, that God means by this the associators and those who disbelieve in Him. It is therefore necessary to conclude that it is the associators and those who disbelieve in Him whom God meant by this verse. As for those who commit major sins, Traditions which are decisive for whomever they reach make it manifest to us that they are not the ones meant by it. Whoever opposes the proof of widespread Traditions and demonstrative Reports, and denies this, cannot assert that this verse and others like it, which include them in general in the Threat, testify against those who commit major sins that they will dwell forever in the Fire, for the interpretation of the Qur'ān is only comprehensible through the explanation of one to whom God has given the elucidation (*bayān*) of the Qur'ān, and the ostensive reading of a verse can have a general meaning with respect to a category 'at the same time' as it can have a particular demonstrable meaning with respect to 'the same' category.

The opponents of the Tradition that those who commit major sins are excepted 'from eternal dwelling in the Fire' are asked the same question as we ask of those who deny that an adulterer of 'previously' unblemished character should be stoned, and that the menstruating woman has no duty to pray as long as she is menstruating; these two questions are exactly the same.¹

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-AḤĀṬAT BI-HI KHAṬĪ'ATU-HU

By His words «and his transgression encompasses him» He means that it has amassed on him, and he then dies in 'that state' before turning 'to God' and repenting of it. The original meaning of *iḥāṭa* is to 'encircle' something, as in *ḥā'it* (= wall) by which a habitation is surrounded. Likewise God says «a fire, whose canopy encompasses (*aḥāṭa*) them» (18: 29).

¶ Whoso associates 'partners' with God and commits a multitude

sins, and dies before turning and repenting—those are the dwellers in the Fire, there they shall abide forever. [⇒Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 1429; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Khuthaim, 1430, 1438; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1431; ⇒Mujāhid, 1432; ⇒Abū Razīn, 1437; ⇒Al-A'mash, 1439; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1441]

⇒Qatāda:

Khaṭi'a 'means': A major sin which will necessarily 'be punished in the Fire'. [1433, and 1434. See also ⇒Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1435; ⇒Mujāhid, 1436; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1440]

⇒Ibn Juraij:

I said to 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ¹: 'What does 'mean' and his transgression encompasses him' mean? He said: 'It means' associating 'partners with God'. Then he recited «And whoso comes with an evil deed (*saiyi'a*), their faces shall be thrust into the Fire» (27: 90). [1442]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-ULĀ' IKA AṢḤĀBU 'L-NĀRI*
HUM FĪ-HĀ KHĀLIDŪNA

¶ Those who have earned evil deeds and are surrounded by their transgressions will be the inhabitants of the Fire, and they will dwell there forever.

§ Ṭabarī explains the use of *ṣāhib* (=lit., an 'associate' or 'companion') here as reflecting the fact that these people prefer to do in this world those deeds which will lead to the Fire rather than those deeds which will lead to the Garden, in the same way as a man's companion prefers his company to that of anyone else.

(...)

¹ This is a refutation of the Mu'tazila in their assertion that those believers who commit major sins shall dwell forever in the Fire. The two legal cases mentioned are examples of rulings for which there is no text in the Qur'ān, but for which there are attested Traditions.

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وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

wa-'lladhīna āmanū wa-'amilu 'l-ṣāliḥāti ulā'ika aṣḥābu 'l-jannati
hum fī-hā khālīdūna

And those that believe, and do deeds of righteousness—those are the inhabitants of Paradise; there they shall dwell forever.

¶ «AND those that believe»—those who testify to the truth of what Muḥammad brought—«and do deeds of righteousness»—and obey God, set up His limits, perform His ordinances, and keep away from what He has forbidden—. . . «are the inhabitants of Paradise; there they shall dwell forever»

This verse and the one before it are statements from God to His servants about the permanence of the Fire and the continual existence of its inhabitants therein, and the permanence of the Garden and the continual existence of its inhabitants therein, and the perpetuity of what He has prepared in each of them for its inhabitants; and they are a refutation by God of those Jews of the Children of Israel who said that the Fire would not touch them save for a number of days, and that after that they would proceed to the Garden. Thus He informs them that unbelievers among them will stay in the Fire forever, and that the believers among them will stay in the Garden forever. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1445]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

«And those that believe, and do deeds of righteousness», 'i.e., Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and his Companions, «those are the inhabitants of Paradise; there they shall dwell forever.» [1446]

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ
وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ
وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حَسَنًا ۚ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ
تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

*wa-idh akhadhnā mīthāqa banī Isrā'īla lā ta'budūna illa 'llāha
wa-bi-'l-wālidaini ihsānan wa-dhi 'l-qurbā wa-'l-yatāmā wa-
'l-masākīna wa-qūlū li-'l-nāsi ḥasanan¹ wa-aqīmu 'l-ṣalāta wa-ātu
'l-zakāta thumma tawallaitum illā qalīlan min-kum wa-antum
mu'riḍūna*

And when We took compact with the children of Israel 'that' you shall not serve 'any' save God; and 'to do' good to both parents, and to kinsmen, and to orphans, and to the needy; and speak good to people, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms.

Then you turned away, all but a few of you, giving up.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH AKHADHNĀ MĪTHĀQA
BANĪ ISRĀ'ĪLA LĀ TA'BUDŪNA ILLA 'LLĀHA*

(...)

¶ And remember also, O community of the Children of Israel, when We took compact with you not to serve 'any' but God.² [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1447]

§ Ṭabarī quotes and allows, in place of «*lā ta'budūna*», the variant reading «*lā ya'budūna* (=they shall not serve)». The meaning, he points out, is the same, only in the first case the exact words are quoted, while in the second case indirect speech is used.

He also says that there is an omitted, but clearly understood, *an* (=that) before «*lā ta'budūna*». Since *an* is omitted, the verb is, according to sound usage, in the indicative rather than in the subjunctive required by *an*.

(...)

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

'This is' the compact which He took from them in 'the sura of'
'The Table' (al-Mā'ida, 5: 12). [1450]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-BI-'L-WĀLIDAINI IHSĀNAN*

§ Ṭabarī explains that certain words, including a verb, are omitted in this phrase, the ostensive wording sufficing to show what the meaning is. The expanded version would read *wa-bi-an tuḥsinū ila 'l-wālidaini ihsānan* (=and that you shall do good towards 'your' two parents). He also cites variant interpretations from grammarians.

(...)

QUESTION: What is this good which He took compact with them to do towards parents?

REPLY: It is the same as the duty towards 'parents' which God has imposed on our Community: to do what is proper concerning them, to speak kindly to them, to show humility towards them out of mercy, to be affectionate and compassionate with them, to wish good for them, and the such like

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-DHI 'L-QURBĀ WA-'L-YATĀMĀ
WA-'L-MASĀKĪNĪ*

¶ And with kinsmen, to consolidate the relationship and kinship with them.

(...)

As for «*al-yatāmā*», it is the plural of *yatīm* (=orphan) . . . , and includes both male and female 'orphans'.

¶ And with orphans, to feel mercy and compassion for them; and with the needy, to give them their rights which God has made payable from your wealth.

«'The needy» are those who are humbled and humiliated though poverty and need³

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-QŪLŪ LI-'L-NĀSI ḤASANAN*

§ The mood of the verbs changes here in the middle of the verse from the

imperfect to the imperative, but Ṭabarī says that it would have been equally correct if the first verb «*lā ta'budūna* (= you shall not serve)» had been *lā ta'budū* (= do not serve). This, in fact, was the reading of Ubaiy b. Ka'b.⁴ This also accords, Ṭabarī points out, with what he has already said at the beginning of the exegesis of this verse about the interchangeability of verbatim quotation and indirect speech within the same passage in Arabic discourse.⁵

... All the Kufan reciters except 'Āṣim recited «*ḥasanan*», while all the Medinan reciters recited «*ḥusnan*», while it is related that one reciter used to recite «*ḥusnā*».

§ Ṭabarī then gives the opinions of some Baṣran grammarians about the differences in meaning between the first two of these readings: they are two words with the same meaning; *ḥusn* has a general meaning encompassing all kinds of 'goodness' while *ḥasan* is restricted to only one, or some, of these meanings. Ṭabarī believes that there is some truth in this last opinion, and he therefore chooses the reading «*ḥasanan*», for in this passage it is specifically 'speaking good' which is meant, not 'good' in general. He dismisses the reading *ḥusnā* both for contravening the consensus of the Muslims and for linguistic reasons.

As for the interpretation of the «good» which God commanded those Children of Israel He described in this verse to speak to people:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«*ʾA*nd speak good to people»; He commanded them also, besides this morality, to speak good to people, to command those who do not say it and who abhor it to 'testify that' there is no god but Allāh. (...) «*G*ood» is also mildness of speech, which falls under good and courteous behaviour and noble morality, and this is what God approves of and loves. [1451]

⇒ Abu 'l-ʿĀliya:

'It means: Say what is proper (*ma'rūfan*) to people. [1452; see also ⇒ 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ, 1455]

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

'It means: Speak truthfully with respect to Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. [1453]

⇒ Sufyān al-Thaurī:

'It means: Command them to what is proper (*al-ma'rūf*), and forbid them from what is reprehensible (*al-munkar*). [1454]

⇒ 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ:

'It means: Speak good to all people. [1456, 1457]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-AQĪMU 'L-ṢALĀṬA

¶ Perform 'the prayer' with the duties which are incumbent on you in them. [⇒ Ibn Mas'ūd, 1458]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ĀTU 'L-ZAKĀTA

We have previously explained the meaning of *zakāt* and its origin.⁶ As for the *zakāt* which God commanded the Children of Israel, whom He mentioned in this verse, 'to give':

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The giving of *zakāt* is the *zakāt* God required them to offer from their wealth, which was a custom (*sunna*) for them different from the *sunna* of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace. The *zakāt* on their wealth was a sacrifice to which fire descended and which it carried away, and this was its acceptance. Whoever the fire did not do this for was not successful, and the earnings he offered up were not lawful: 'they had been' unjust⁷ or oppressive⁷ obtained⁷, or attained by 'means' other than those God had commanded him 'to use' and had explained to him. [1459]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

By «*zakāt*» He means obedience to God and sincerity. [1460]

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA TAWALLAITUM ILLĀ QALĪLAN MIN-KUM WA-ANTUM MU'RİQŪNA

This is a statement by God about the Jews of the Children of Israel, that they broke His covenant and violated His compact after He had taken from them a promise to keep it Then they opposed all He had commanded . . . , and turned away from Him, giving up,⁷ except those among them whom God had preserved and who had discharged God's covenant and compact. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1461 and 1462]

An 'interpreter' said that God meant by «then you turned away» the Jews who were contemporary with Muḥammad, although in the rest

of the verse He meant their forebears, as if he believed the meaning of the passage . . . was: Then your forebears turned away, all but a few of them. But He addressed their living descendants—as we have previously mentioned¹—and then said: And you, O surviving community of them, also discarded the compact about that which was taken from you, and abandoned it as your ancestors had done.

Others said instead that His words «Then you turned away, all but a few of you, giving up» were addressed «entirely» to the Jews of the Children of Israel who were in the vicinity of the abode of emigration (Medina) of the Messenger of God, censuring them for breaking the compact which had been taken from them in the Torah, for changing God's command and committing acts of disobedience towards Him.

¹ See the exegesis of the present verse for this, Ṭabarī's preferred reading.

² See *Exeg.* 2: 27, pp. 186–90.

³ See *Exeg.* 2: 61, pp. 353–4.

⁴ See also *Exeg.* 2: 63, where an imperative is used in a similar context.

⁵ For a related discussion, see *Exeg.* 1: 1, p. 63.

⁶ See *Exeg.* 2: 43, p. 280, and *Exeg.* 2: 3, pp. 99–100 and n. 5.

⁷ See *Exeg.* 2: 64, p. 368.

⁸ See, e.g., *Exeg.* 2: 75, p. 401; for similar usages see also the references there in n. 1.

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وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ
أَنفُسَكُمْ مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تُشْهَدُونَ

*wa-idh akhadhnā mīthāqa-kum lā tasfikūna dimā'a-kum wa-lā
tukhrijūna anfusa-kum min diyāri-kum thumma aqrartum wa-antum
tashhadūna*

And when We took compact with you «that» you shall not shed
your own blood, neither expel your own from your habitations;
then you consented, and you bore witness.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH AKHADHNĀ MĪTHĀQA-KUM
LĀ TASFIKŪNA DIMĀ'A-KUM WA-LĀ TUKHRIJŪNA ANFUSA-KUM
MIN DIYĀRI-KUM*

«THIS passage» . . . is similar in meaning and inflection to «the first part
of the previous verse»

(...)

QUESTION: Were the people killing themselves and expelling
themselves from their own houses, and they were forbidden to do this?

REPLY: The matter is not as you suppose. They were forbidden to kill
each other [=Qatāda, 1464 and 1466; ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1465]. It was as if
when one man among them killed another he had killed himself, since
their religious community was «one, and the two persons were» as a
single man, as «Muḥammad», peace be upon him, said:

The believers are as a single body in their compassion and affection
for each other; when one «member» of it is suffering, the rest of the
body rallies to him with fever and sleeplessness. [1463]

It is possible that the meaning of «you shall not shed your own
blood» is: No man among you shall kill another, and thereby become
subject to the *lex talionis* (*qiṣāṣ*), for then he would be his own killer,
because he would be one who had himself brought about that for
which killing «in retribution» was deserved. Thus his own killing at the

hands of the murdered man's avenger in retaliation would be ascribed to him. It is like saying to a man who has done something for which punishment is due and who is punished: 'You brought this upon yourself.'

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA AQRARTUM

¶ Then you consented to the compact which We had taken with you not to shed your own blood and expel your own from your habitations. [⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1467. 1468]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-ANTUM TASHHADŪNA

[T]: FIRST OPINION: Some said that God addressed the Jews who were in the vicinity of the abode of emigration of the Messenger of God¹, Medina,¹ when he emigrated there, censuring them for neglecting the ordinances of the Torah whose jurisdiction they had accepted and which was in their hands. So God said to them: «Then you consented», meaning thereby the consent of their ancestors and forebears, «and you bore witness» to their consent by accepting 'My' compact with them not to shed their 'own' blood and not to expel their own from their habitations, and you attested that this was a duty from My compact with them. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1469]

SECOND OPINION: Others said instead that this was a statement from God about their ancestors, but that He expressed this statement about them as a 'direct' address, in the same way as we have described in the case of other verses which are similar to 'this one' which we have previously explained.¹

(...)

TABARĪ'S OPINION: In our view the most correct opinion concerning the interpretation of this is that His words «and you bore witness» is a statement about their forebears, and that those of them who were addressed and who knew the Messenger of God were included 'in it', just as His words «And when We took compact with you» are a statement about their forebears although it is addressed to those who knew the Messenger of God. For God took compact with those of the Children of Israel who were contemporary with the

Messenger of God, Moses, in the way He has described to us in His Book, and the jurisdiction of the Torah was imposed on all their descendants after them just as it was imposed on those who were contemporary with Moses. Then He censured those of them who were addressed in these verses for their and their ancestors' breaking of this compact, and for their denying the pledges they had committed themselves to keeping, through His words «then you consented, and you bore witness». Since it is addressed to those who were contemporary with our prophet, 'those who are' meant by it are all of them who were contemporary with Moses and after him who entered into the compact, as well as all of them who bore witness by attesting the truth of what was in the Torah, for God did not specify some of them rather than others in His words «then you consented, and you bore witness», 'nor' in 'other' verses which are like this, and the 'ostensive reading of the' verse permits that all of them are meant. Since this is so, no one can claim that some of them rather than others are meant. The verdict is the same for the verses which follow, I mean His words «Then there you are killing one another . . .», for He has mentioned to us that their forebears used to do the same things in this respect as did their descendants who witnessed the era of our prophet, Muḥammad.

¹ See, e.g., *Exeg.* 2: 83, p. 426 and n. 8.

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ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنْكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِهِمْ تَظْهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِن يَأْتِوكُمُ اسْرَىٰ¹ تَفْدُوهُمْ¹ وَهُوَ مُحَرَّمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِيلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ¹

thumma antum hā'ulā'i taqtulūna anfusa-kum wa-tukhrijūna farīqan min-kum min diyāri-him taẓāharūna 'alay-him bi-'l-ithmi wa-'l-'udwāni wa-in ya'tū-kum asrā¹ tafdū-hum¹ wa-huwa muḥarramun 'alay-kum ikhrāju-hum a-fa-tu'minūna bi-ba'di 'l-kitābi wa-takfurūna bi ba'din fa-mā jazā'u man yaf'alu dhālika min-kum illā khizyun fi 'l-ḥayāti 'l-dunyā wa-yauma 'l-qi'yāmati yuraddūna ilā ashaddi 'l-'adhābi wa-ma'llāhu bi-ghāfilin 'am-mā ya'malūna¹

Then there you are killing one another, and expelling a party of you from their habitations, supporting each other against them in sin and transgression; and if they come to you as captives, you ransom them; yet their expulsion was forbidden you. What, do you believe in part of the scripture, and disbelieve in part? The only recompense for those of you who do that is degradation in the present life, and on the Day of the Resurrection to be returned unto the most terrible of chastisement. And God is not heedless of the things they do.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THUMMA ANTUM HĀ'ULĀ'I
TAQTULŪNA ANFUSA-KUM WA-TUKHRIJŪNA FARĪQAN
MIN-KUM MIN DIYĀRI-HIM TAẒĀHARŪNA 'ALAY-HIM
BI-'L-ITHMI WA-'L-'UDWĀNI

[L]: «THUMMA ANTUM HĀ'ULĀ'I»: FIRST POINT OF VIEW: By it is meant 'Then you, O these 'people' (*thumma antum yā hā'ulā'i*)', only the *yā* (= O!) is omitted since the passage 'itself' suffices to indicate it. 'This is' like His words «Joseph, turn away from this (*Yūsufu a'riḍ 'an hādhā*)» (12: 29), whose interpretation is: O Joseph, turn away from this. The meaning of the passage is thus¹, according to this interpretation¹: O community of Jews of the Children of Israel, after you consented to the compact which I took with you not to shed your 'own' blood and not to expel your own from their habitations, then you acknowledged—after you yourselves had born witness—that this was a right I had against you which you had to fulfill for me; and then you kill one another and expel a party of you from their habitations, co-operating against them in sin and enmity in your expulsion of them.

§ Ṭabarī derives the meaning of «*taẓāharūna* (=supporting each other)» from *ẓahr* (=back), i.e., they were at each other's backs.

SECOND POINT OF VIEW: It means: Then you 'were' a people who killed yourselves. It reduces to a proposition with 'you' as a subject, and *hā'ulā'* is interposed between 'you' and its predicate¹, according to Arabic usage¹

§ Ṭabarī also gives the opinion of a Baṣran grammarian that «*hā'ulā'i*» serves to intensify «*antum* (=you)».

[T]: «AND YOU»: FIRST OPINION:

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«Then there you are killing one another, and expelling a party of you from their habitations» 'in' to 'the hands of' the polytheists, «supporting each other against them in sin and enmity», so that you shed their blood with them, and expel them from their habitations with them. (...) God had censured them for this action of theirs, when He outlawed the shedding of their blood for them in the Torah, and made the ransoming of captives incumbent on them therein.

They were two parties: one group of them were from the Banū Qainuqā', allies of the Khazraj, and 'another group was' al-Naḍīr and Quraiza, allies of the Aus. When war broke out between the Aus and the Khazraj,² the Banū Qainuqā' fought alongside the Khazraj, and the Naḍīr and Quraiza alongside the Aus, each of the two groups helping its allies against its brothers, so that they shed each other's blood although they had the Torah before them from which they knew what they should and should not do. The Aus and the Khazraj were polytheists who worshipped idols, and who knew of neither the Garden nor the Fire, of neither the Awakening nor the Resurrection, nor of scripture, nor of what was unlawful and what was lawful.

When the war came to an end, they ransomed their captives from each other, attesting what was in the Torah, and following it: the Banū Qainuqā' ransoming their captives who were in the hands of the Aus, and the Naḍīr and Quraiza ransoming those of them who were in the hands of the Khazraj, leaving the blood they had spilt and the dead who had been killed in their conflict unavenged, 'while' helping the polytheists against them.

When He censured them for this, God said: «What, do you believe in part of the scripture, and disbelieve in part?», i.e.: You ransomed them according to the ruling of the Torah, but you

killed 'some of' them 'also', and in the ruling 's' of the Torah 'it' is 'established' that they should not be killed, nor driven out of their habitations, and that those who associate 'partners' with God and worship idols apart from Him should not be helped against them; and 'you did all this' desiring some trifling good of this world.

'Muḥammad b. Ishāq, one of the transmitters of this Tradition, said: This story was sent down concerning this act of theirs with the Aus and the Khazraj, according to what has reached me. [1471; see also ⇒Al-Suddī, 1472, ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1473]

SECOND OPINION:

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

Whenever the Children of Israel considered a tribe to be weak, they used to expel them from their habitations. But the compact had been taken from them not to shed their 'own' blood and not to expel their own from their habitations. [1474]

As for 'udwān, it . . . comes from 'the Vth form verb' *ta'addā* . . . , and 'is used' when someone transgresses the proper bounds in injustice and wrong against another.

[R]: The reciters differed about the recitation of «*tazāharūna*»: some of them recited it «*tazāharūna*», for *tatazāharūnā*, a VIth form verb¹, suppressing a second *t* 'before the *z*'; and others recited «*tazẓāharūna*», doubling the *z*, to be interpreted as *tatazāharūna*. . . . Although these two recitations differ in wording, they agree in meaning. Thus it is the same whichever of these two the reciters read, for they are both well-known words, two readings widespread in the Islamic cities with the same meaning. Neither of them has a meaning which would merit its being chosen in preference to the other, except that someone might choose «*tazẓāharūna*», seeking thereby to make the word complete.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IN YA'TŪ-KUM USĀRĀ
TUFĀDŪ-HUM WA-HUWA MUḤARRAMUN 'ALAY-KUM
IKHRĀJU-HUM A-FA-TU'MINŪNA BI-BA'DI 'L-KITĀBI
WA-TAKFURŪNA BI-BA'DIN

¶ Then, after you^r, the Jews,¹ consented to the compact which I took with you . . . , although you killed those of you^r own people¹ you killed, whenever you found a captive from you^r party¹ in the hands of

others 'who were' your enemies, you ransomed him, and some of you turned others out of their habitations. And your killing of them and your turning them out of their habitations was unlawful for you, and 'also' to leave them in the hands of your enemy; so why do you think it permissible to kill them, but do not think it permissible to fail to ransom them from the hands of your enemy? Or, why do you not think it permissible not to ransom them, and think it permissible to kill them? For these two things are equal in terms of the obligation on you from the ruling concerning them, because I made killing them and expelling them from their habitations unlawful for you 'in' the same 'way' as I made leaving them captive in the hands of your enemy unlawful for you. So do you believe in part of the scripture in which I imposed My legal obligations upon you, in which I explained My legal limits to you—and I took My compact with you to act according to what was in it—and consent to it, and ransom your captives from the hands of your enemy, 'and at the same time' disbelieve in 'another' part of it and reject it, and kill those of your own religion and your own people whom I have forbidden you to kill, and turn them out of their habitations? Yet you know that any disbelief on your behalf in part of it is an infringement of My covenant and My compact on your part.' [⇒Qatāda, 1375, 1478; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1376; ⇒Mujāhid, 1477; see also ⇒Ibn Juraij, 1481]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

Whenever the Children of Israel considered a tribe weak, they used to expel them from their habitations. But the compact had been taken from them not to shed their 'own' blood and not to expel their own from their habitations. And the compact had been taken from them that if some of them were taken captive they should ransom them. But they expelled them from their habitations and then ransomed them. Thus they believed in part of the scripture, and disbelieved in part of it: they believed in ransoming and ransomed 'their captives', but did not believe 'that it was wrong' to expel them from 'their' habitations and expelled them. [1479; see 1474 above, of which this is the continuation]

⇒Abu 'l-Āliya:

'Abd Allāh b. Salām was passing the Exilarch (*ra's al-jālūt*) in Kūfa who was ransoming women whom the Arabs had not had intercourse with, and not ransoming those the Arabs had had

intercourse with, so 'Abd Allāh b. Salām said to him: 'But you have it written in your scripture: "Ransom all of them." [1480]

§ Ṭabarī notes the following variant recitations: *usārā tafdū-hum*, *asārā tufādū-hum*, *asārā tafdū-hum*, and *asrā tufādū-hum*. He regards *asrā* and *asārā* as both permissible plurals of *asīr* (= captive), and dismisses the view that there is any difference in meaning, but he prefers *asrā* on the basis of an analogy with words of similar meaning. He prefers *tafdū-hum* to *tufādū-hum*, because the latter implies a reciprocal ransoming which, according to Ṭabarī, is not meant here. He also gives two alternative interpretations of the meaning of «*wa-huwa muḥarramun 'alay-kum ikhrāju-hum* (yet their expulsion was forbidden you)». One interpretation is that the pronoun «*huwa*» refers back to the 'expulsion' that has been mentioned previously, and in this case «*ikhrāju-hum*» is merely a repetition. The other interpretation is that «*huwa*» is a supportive pronoun ('*imād*') which has no semantic role in the sentence yet is required because the conjunction *wa-* must be followed here by a noun rather than a verb.

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-MĀ JAZĀ'U MAN YAF'ALU
DHALIKA MIN-KUM ILLĀ KHIZYUN FI 'L-HAYĀTI 'L-DUNYĀ

¶ For someone who kills one of you—he disbelieves by killing him in violation of God's covenant which He imposed on him in the Torah . . .—, and expels a group of you from their habitations . . .—contrary to God's command in His Book which He sent down to Moses—, the only recompense³ . . . is degradation (*khizy*) in the life of this world . . .

[T]: «DEGRADATION»: FIRST OPINION: Some said that this was God's ruling which He sent down to His prophet, Muḥammad: the seizure of the murderer for the person he killed, the exaction of retaliation for 'the murder', and the revenge for the injured against the wrongdoer.

SECOND OPINION: Others said instead that it was the poll-tax levied on them wherever they practised their religion as a humiliation and degradation for them.

THIRD OPINION: Others said instead that this degradation with which they were recompensed in this world was the Messenger of God's expulsion of al-Naḍīr from their habitations at the first mustering, the killing of the warriors of the Qurayza and the captivity of their offspring;⁴ this was a degradation in this world, and in the Hereafter they will receive a grievous punishment.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YAUMA 'L-QIYĀMATI
YURADDŪNA ILĀ ASHADDI 'L-'ADHĀBI

By 'this' . . . He means that on the Day of the Resurrection . . . they will be returned . . . to the most grievous punishment that God has prepared for His enemies.

Some said that it meant that on the Day of the Resurrection they will be returned to 'a punishment' more severe than the punishment of this world, but there is no sense to this opinion, because God stated that they would be returned to the most grievous of the meanings of punishment, and that is why there is 'the definite article,' *al-*, for He meant by this the whole genus of punishment, not just one kind of it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MA 'LLĀHU BI-GHĀFILIN
'AM-MĀ YA' MALŪNA

§ Ṭabarī reports the variant reading «*ya'malūna* (=they do)», referring back to those whose recompense for their actions has just been described. He prefers this reading to the reading «*ta'malūna* (=you do)» which refers back to those who «believe in part of the scripture, and disbelieve in part», since the latter statement is more remote from the reference than the former.⁵

¹ For these, Ṭabarī's preferred readings, as opposed to «*usārā*», «*tufādū-hum*», and «*ta'malūna*», respectively, see the *Exeg.* of this verse.

² According to a Tradition from al-Suddī [1472], this was the battle of Sumair, named after a man from the Banū 'Amr b. 'Auf, which was fought in pre-Islamic times (Sh. & Sh., II, 306, n. 7).

³ See *Exeg.* 2: 48, p. 292.

⁴ The Banū al-Naḍīr were a Jewish tribe who planned treachery against the Prophet in 4 AH. He declared war on them, but they pleaded to be spared on the condition that they be allowed to go into exile taking their property with them. This they were granted, so they loaded their camels with everything they could lay their hands on, even pulling down their houses and carrying away the lintels of the doors. (See Ibn Ishāq [1955], pp. 437–45. Their story is narrated at the beginning of the sura 'The Mustering—al-Ḥaṣhr', 59). The Banū Qurayza were another Jewish tribe, who aided Abū Sufyān and the Meccans during the battle of the Trench (AH 5) (see *ibid.*, pp. 458–60). Although they were persuaded not to fight alongside the Meccans, Muḥammad decided that they should be judged for their treachery. Sa'd b. Mu'ādh, who was appointed to judge them, ruled that their men should be killed, their property divided, and their women and children taken captive. They were taken to Medina, the men were beheaded, and the property, women, and children divided among the Muslims (see *ibid.*, pp. 461–6). The story of the battle of the Trench is recounted in 33: 9–27, vs. 26–7 being a particular reference to the Banū Qurayza.

⁵ For *ghāfil* (=heedless), see *Exeg.* 2: 74, p. 400.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يَخَفُ
عَنَّهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

*ulā'ika 'lladhīna 'shtarawu 'l-ḥayāta 'l-dunyā bi-'l-ākhirati fa-lā
yukhaḥḥafu 'an-humu 'l-'adhābu wa-lā hum yunṣarūna*

Those who have purchased the present life at the price of the world to come—for them the chastisement shall not be lightened, neither shall they be helped.

By 'these' words of His He means those whom He reported as believing in part of the scripture, ransoming their captives from the Jews, and disbelieving in part of it, killing those of their co-religionists whom God had forbidden them to kill, and expelling from their habitations those whom God had forbidden them to expel, thereby violating God's covenant and compact with them in the Torah. Then God stated that these are the ones who purchased a leading position in the life of this world over the impotent, ignorant, and foolish members of their own religious community, who bought the base, vile fruits therein at the price of faith, for which, if they had put it forth instead of unbelief, they would have had eternal life in the Gardens. So God described them as purchasing the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter because they were content with this world, unbelieving in God therein, taking it in exchange for the felicity of the Hereafter which God has prepared for the believers. God makes their portion of the felicity of the Hereafter, with their unbelief in Him, the price at which they bought the base 'things' of this world.¹ [⇒ Qatāda, 1482]

Then God stated that since they sold their portion of the felicity of the Hereafter by abandoning obedience to Him and preferring unbelief and the base 'things' of this world, they have no share in the felicity of the Hereafter, and that what they will have in the Hereafter is chastisement, a chastisement which will not be lightened for them; because those for whom the chastisement will be lightened are those who have a share in the felicity of 'the Hereafter' . . .

As for His words «neither shall they be helped», God stated 'here'

that no one will help them in the Hereafter, and . . . drive back God's chastisement from them—either by power, or intercession, or anything else.

¹ See Exeg. 2: 16, p. 138.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ
وَأَتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ
أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ
فَفَرِّقَهَا كَذَبْتُمْ وَفَرِّقًا تَقْتُلُونَ

*wa-la-qad ātainā Mūsā 'l-kitāba wa-qaffainā min ba'di-hi bi-'l-rusuli
wa-ātainā 'Īsā 'bna Maryama 'l-bayyināti wa-aiyadnā-hu bi-rūḥi
'l-quḍusi a-fa-kullamā jā'a-kum rasūlun bi-mā lā tahwā anfusu-kumu
'stakbartum fa-farīqan kadḥabtum wa-farīqan taqtulūna*

And We gave Moses the scripture, and sent succeeding Messengers after him; and We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, the clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit; and whensoever a Messenger came to you with that your souls had no desire for, you became arrogant, and cried lies to some, and slew some.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA-QAD ĀTAINĀ MŪSĀ 'L-KITĀBA
WA-QAFFAINĀ MIN BA'DI-HI BI-'L-RUSULI

By His words «And We gave Moses the scripture» He means: We sent it down to him.¹ . . . And the scripture which God gave to Moses was the Torah.

As for . . . «wa-qaffainā», He means 'We caused to follow', 'We made them follow each other', just as one man follows (*yaqfū*) another when he proceeds in his tracks after him. The origin of 'the verb' is 'the noun' *qafā* (= nape, occiput), and one says *qasautu* . . . when one happens to be at the back of someone's head . . .

By His words «after him» He means 'after Moses'; and by «*rusul*» He means 'prophets' (*anbiyā'*): it is the plural of *rasūl* . . .

By His words «and after him sent succeeding Messengers» He means: We caused them to follow one after the other in the same path and with the same revealed law (*sharī'a*). For everyone whom God sent as a prophet after Moses up until the time of Jesus, the son of Mary, was sent with the ordinance to the Children of Israel to practise 'the law of' the Torah, to act according to what was in it, and to call 'others' to what was in it. . . .

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-ĀTAINĀ 'ĪSA 'BNA MARYAMA 'L-BAYYINĀTI*

(...)

By «the clear signs» which God gave him, He means the proofs and demonstrations of his prophethood which were manifested through him: the reviving of the dead, the healing of the blind, and the rest of the signs which made clear his station from God, and demonstrated his veracity and the truth of his prophethood. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1483]²

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-AIYADNĀ-HUBI-RŪḤI 'L-QUDUSI*

The meaning of . . . «*wa-aiyadnā-hu* (= and confirmed him)» is: And We strengthened him, and supported him [⇒ Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 1484] . . .

[T]: «*RŪḤI 'L-QUDUSĪ*/SPIRIT OF HOLINESS»: FIRST OPINION: Some said that the Holy Spirit which God stated that He supported Jesus with was Gabriel. [⇒ Qatāda, 1485; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1486; ⇒ Al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 1487; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1488]

⇒ Shahr b. Ḥaushab al-Ash'arī:

A group of Jews asked the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, saying: 'Tell us about the Spirit.' He said: 'I adjure you by God and by His days (*ayyāmi-hi*) with the Children of Israel, do you know that it is Gabriel, and that it is he who comes to me?' They said: 'Yes.' [1489]

SECOND OPINION: Others said that the spirit with which God supported Jesus was the Evangel.

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

God confirmed Jesus with the Evangel as a spirit, just as He made the Qur'ān a spirit, both of them are the spirit of God, as God said: «Even so We have revealed to you a spirit of Our bidding.» (42: 52) [1490]

THIRD OPINION: Others said that it is the name with which Jesus revived the dead. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1491]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most correct of these interpretations of this 'phrase' is the opinion of those who said that «the spirit», in this place, was Gabriel, for God stated that He confirmed Jesus through him, as He stated in His words: «When God said: 'Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I confirmed you with the Holy Spirit, to speak to men in the cradle, and of age; and when I taught you the scripture, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Evangel» (5: 110). If the spirit with which God supported him had been the Evangel, His words «when I confirmed you with the Holy Spirit» and «when I taught you the scripture, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Evangel» would have been merely a meaningless repetition, . . . and that would have been an idle thing to say, and God is far above that He should address His servants with something that is of no benefit to them. Since this is the case, the incorrectness of the opinion of those who claim that «spirit» in this place is the Evangel is evident, although every one of God's scriptures which He revealed to His Messengers is a spirit from Him, because dead hearts are revived, fleeing souls are reanimated, and errant minds are rightly guided, by it.

God calls Gabriel a 'spirit', and qualifies him with '*qudus*' (=holiness)', because, by God's creation, he has a spirit from Him, without any begetting by a father of his son. Therefore he was called a 'spirit', and qualified with *qudus*—and *qudus* means 'purity'—, just as Jesus, the son of Mary, was called a 'spirit' of God because He created him as a spirit from Him without any begetting by a father of his son.

We have already explained in our book³ that *taqdīs* means 'purification'; and *qudus*, meaning 'purity', is related to this. And the interpreters differed about its meaning in this place in the same way as they did in the place we mentioned it before.

⇒ Al-Suddī:

Qudus is blessing (*baraka*). [1492]

⇒ Abū Ja'far al-Rāzī:

Al-qudus is the Lord, sublime is His remembrance. [1493]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

God is *al-qudus*, and He confirmed Jesus with His spirit. (...) *Qudus* is the attribute of God. (...) «He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy (*quddūs*)» (59: 23). (...) *Al-qudus* and *al-quddūs* are identical. [1494; see also ⇒ Ka'b al-Aḥbār, 1495]

THE INTERPRETATION OF A-FA-KULLA-MĀ JĀ'A-KUM RASŪLUN
BI-MĀ LĀ TAHWĀ ANFUSU-KUMU 'STAKBARTUM FA-FARĪQAN
KADHDHABTUM WA-FARĪQAN TAQTULŪNA

¶ O community of Jews of the Children of Israel, We gave Moses the Torah and followed with Messengers to you after him, and We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, the clear signs and proofs when We sent him to you, and We strengthened him with the Holy Spirit, but, whenever one of My Messengers came to you with something your souls did not desire, you displayed arrogance towards him, haughtily and unjustly, with the arrogance of your leader, Iblīs: some of them you gave the lie, and some of them you killed. This has ever been what you do with My Messengers. [⇒ Mujāhid, 1496]

Although «*a-fa-kulla-mā*» is expressed as a question in order to elicit an acknowledgement from the addressed, it has the meaning of a statement.

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 43, p. 280.

² For further miracles mentioned in this Tradition, see 3: 48–50.

³ See *Exeg.* 2: 30, p. 226.

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وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا
يُؤْمِنُونَ

wa-qālū qulūbu-nā ghulfun bal la'ana-humu 'llāhu bi-kufri-him
fa-qalīlan mā yu'minūna

And they said: 'Our hearts are veiled.' Nay, but God has cursed them for their unbelief; little will they believe.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-QĀLŪ QULŪBU-NĀ GHULFUN

[R]: FIRST RECITATION: As for those who read . . . «*ghulfun*»¹, which is the reading of the cities in all the lands², they interpreted it, saying: 'Our hearts are in shelters [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1498], under covers [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1499; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1508], and enveloped.' And *ghulf*, according to their reading, is the plural of *aghlaf*, which is something which is in a envelope or cover: as one says of a man who is not circumcised *aghlaf*, and 'of' a woman *ghalfā*' . . .

⇒ Hudhaifa:

There are four 'kinds of' hearts.—Then he mentioned them, and concerning what he mentioned he said—The «covered (*aghlaf*) heart» is wrapped up; this is the heart of the unbeliever. [1497]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

«And they say: 'Our hearts are *ghulfun*'», and these are the hearts which have been sealed. [1500; see also ⇒ Qatāda, 1506]

⇒ Mujāhid:

«And they say: 'Our hearts are *ghulfun*'», over which is a veil (*ghishāwa*). [1501, 1502]

⇒ Al-A'mash:

'These hearts' are enveloped (*ft ghuluf*). [1503]

⇒ Qatāda:

«And they say: 'Our hearts are *ghulfun*'», i.e., they do not understand. [1504; see also ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1507]

⇒Qatāda:

This is like His words «Our hearts are screened» (41: 5). [1505; see also 1506]

⇒Ibn Zaid:

My heart is enveloped (*fī ghilāf*) when nothing you say reaches it. (...) «'Our hearts are veiled (*fī akinnatin*) from what you call us to'» (41: 5). [1509]

SECOND RECITATION: As for those who read it «*ghulufun*», they interpreted: 'Our hearts are envelopes for knowledge' [⇒Aṭiya, 1511, 1512]—meaning that they were receptacles. According to their interpretation, *ghuluf* is the plural of *ghilāf*, . . . , and the meaning of the passage is . . . : The Jews said: 'Our hearts are envelopes and receptacles for knowledge and other things.'

⇒Aṭiya:

«They said their hearts were¹ receptacles for remembrance. [1510]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«They said their hearts were¹ filled with knowledge, and had no need of Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, or anyone else. [1513]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The only permissible recitation of «this passage¹ . . . is that of those who read «*ghulufun*» . . . , meaning that they are veiled and covered, because all the authorities of the reciters and interpreters agree on its correctness and on the deviation of . . . those who recite . . . «*ghulufun*»

THE INTERPRETATION OF *BAL LA'ANA-HUMU 'LLĀHU BI-KUFRI-HIM*

¶ Nay, God has dismissed them, banished them, driven them away, dishonoured them, and ruined them, for their unbelief, for the denial of the signs and clear indications of God and of what the Messengers were sent with, and for their giving His prophets the lie.

So God stated that He banished them from Himself and from His mercy for what they were doing.

The origin of *la'n* (=to curse) is 'driving away', 'banishing', 'dismissing'

In «this passage¹ . . . He gives the lie to those Jews who said «'Our hearts are covered'», because . . . «*bal*» indicates His denial *Bal* is used in speech only to contradict a denial. Since this is the case, it is clear that the meaning of the verse is:

¶ The Jews said: 'Our hearts are screened from what you call us to, O Muḥammad'; and God said: 'This is not as you claim'; but God dismissed the Jews, and banished them and drove them away from His mercy, and dishonoured them for having denied Him and His Messengers; and «little will they believe».

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-QALĪLAN MĀ YU'MINŪNA*

[T]: «LITTLE WILL THEY BELIEVE»: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that it means that . . . only a few of them believed [⇒Qatāda, 1515].

⇒Qatāda:

Upon my life, those who returned «to Islam¹» from the polytheists were more than those who returned from the people of scripture. Only a small group of the people of scripture believed. [1514]

SECOND OPINION: Others said instead that it means that they only believed in a little of what they had at hand. [⇒Ma'mar, quoting an anonymous authority, 1516]

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most correct interpretation of «this¹ . . . is what we shall make clear, God willing, which is that God stated that He cursed those whose description He had given in this verse, then He said about them that they had little faith in what God had sent down to His prophet, Muḥammad, which is why «*qalīlan*» has an accusative ending, because it is an adjective qualifying an omitted verbal noun. It means: Nay, God cursed them for their disbelief, for they believed «only¹ a little (*fa-īmānan qalīlan mā yu'minūna*). It is thus clear from what we have explained that «the opinion¹» narrated from Qatāda concerning this is incorrect, for «his interpretation would mean that¹ . . . *qalīl* should be in the nominative (*qalīlun*), not in the accusative. . . .

§ Ṭabarī reports a disagreement among grammarians about the meaning of «*mā*» here. One said that it was redundant, i.e., that the passage means 'They believed in little'. On the grounds that redundancy cannot be attributed to God's speech, Ṭabarī prefers the opinion of those who refuted this view.

According to the latter, the meaning is rather 'What they believed was but little', which Ṭabarī explains as follows. The Jews believed in God's Oneness, in the Resurrection and its associated reward and punishment, but they did not believe in Muḥammad and his prophethood, although their scriptures commanded them to believe in this. What they believed was thus little in comparison with the important things which they disbelieved in. He reports a further view according to which «but little» means 'nothing at all'.

¹ Ṭabarī here refers back to those places where he has discussed the finality of proofs about which there is a consensus, e.g., *Exeg.* 2: 70, 2: 78, 2: 83.

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وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ
وَكَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ يَسْتَفْتِحُونَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَمَّا
جَاءَهُمْ مَا عَرَفُوا كَفَرُوا بِهِ فَلَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

*wa-lammā jā'a-hum kitābun min 'indi 'llāhi muṣaddiqun li-mā
ma'a-hum wa-kānū min qablu yastaftihūna 'ala 'lladhīna kafarū
fa-lammā jā'a-hum mā 'arafū kafarū bi-hi fa-la'natu 'llāhi 'ala
'l-kāfirīna*

And when a Book came to them from God, confirming what was with them—and they previously prayed for help to overcome the unbelievers—when what they recognized came to them, they disbelieved in it; and the curse of God is on the unbelievers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LAMMĀ JĀ'A-HUM KITĀBUN
MIN 'INDI 'LLĀHI MUṢADDIQUN LI-MĀ MA'A-HUM*

¶ WHEN there came to the Jews of the Children of Israel, whose description He has given, «a Book from God»—meaning by «Book» the Qur'ān which God sent down to Muḥammad—«confirming what was with them»—i.e., confirming the scriptures which were with them which God had sent down before the Qur'ān. [⇒ Qatāda, 1517; ⇒ Al-Rabī', 1518; both specify the scriptures antecedent to the Qur'ān as the Torah and the Evangel.]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-KĀNŪ MIN QABLU YASTAFTIHŪNA
'ALA 'LLADHĪNA KAFARŪ
FA-LAMMĀ JĀ'A-HUM MĀ 'ARAFŪ
KAFARŪ BI-HI*

¶ And these Jews . . . prayed 'to God' for the assistance of Muḥammad . . . in overcoming the polytheist Arabs,¹ before he was sent . . .

⇒ 'Āṣim b. 'Umar b. Qatāda al-Anṣārī:

Some old men among 'the Anṣār' said: By God, this story—i.e., «When there came to them a Book from God, confirming what was with them; and they aforesometimes prayed for help to overcome the unbelievers»—came down concerning us and them—i.e., the Anṣār and the Jews, who were their neighbours—. (...) For a long time during the Jāhiliya we dominated them: we were polytheists and they were people of scripture. And they used to say: 'Now a prophet, whose time is nigh, will be sent to kill you as the 'people of' 'Ād and Iram were killed.'² But when God sent His Messenger from the Quraish and we followed him, they disbelieved in him. God said «when there came to them what they recognized, they disbelieved in it». [1519]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

The Jews used to pray for the help of Muḥammad, before he was sent, to overcome the Aus and the Khazraj. But when God sent him from among the Arabs, they disbelieved in him, and disclaimed what they had been saying about him. Then Mu'ādh b. Jabal and Bishr b. al-Barā' b. Ma'rūr, one of Banū Salma, said to them: 'O community of Jews, fear God and embrace Islam. You used to pray for Muḥammad's help to overcome us when we were polytheists, and tell us that he would be sent, and you described him to us.' Then Salām b. Mishkam, one of the Banū al-Naḍīr, said: 'He brought us nothing we recognize, and he is not the one we used to mention to you.' So God sent down about what they said «And when a Book came to them from God, confirming what was with them—and they previously prayed for help to overcome the unbelievers—when what they recognized came to them, they disbelieved in it; and the curse of God is on the unbelievers.» [1520, 1521; also 1522, 1530, 1532. See also ⇒ 'Alī al-Azdī al-Bāriqī, 1523, 1524, ⇒ Sa'īd b. Jubair, 1531]

⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya:

The Jews used to pray for Muḥammad's help in overcoming the polytheist Arabs, saying: 'O God, send this prophet whom we find written before us so that he may chastise and kill the polytheists.' But when God sent Muḥammad, and they saw that he was not one of them, they disbelieved in him out of envy towards the Arabs. But they knew that he was the Messenger of God, so God said «when what they recognized came to them, they disbelieved in it; and the curse of God is on the unbelievers.» [1526; see also ⇒ Qatāda, 1525, ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1526, ⇒ Aṭṭā, 1528, ⇒ Mujāhid, 1529]

⇒ Ibn Zaid:

The Jews used to pray for help to overcome the Arab unbelievers, saying: 'By God, if the prophet whom Moses and Jesus gave news of, Aḥmad,³ came, we would overcome you.' And they supposed he would be one of them. The Arabs were 'all' around them, and they prayed for him to help them against them, to overcome them. But when what they recognized came to them they disbelieved in it, and were jealous of 'the Arabs'. (...) «Many of the people of scripture wish they might restore you—after you have believed—¹ as unbelievers, in the jealousy of their souls, after the truth has become clear to them» (2: 109). It was evident to them that he was the Messenger of God, and thus God helped the Aus and the Khazraj through their hearing from them that a prophet was coming forth. [1533]

§ Ṭabarī gives two opinions about the apodosis of «And when a Book came to them from God, confirming what was with them». The first is that no apodosis is expressed, since it is clear what it is. The other is that «they disbelieved in it» is the apodosis to both «And when a Book came to them from God, confirming what was with them» and «when what they recognized came to them».

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LA 'NATU 'LLĀHI 'ALA 'L-KĀFIRĪNA

§ Ṭabarī refers to his previous explanations of the meaning of *la'ana* and *kufr*.⁴

(...)

¹ See Exeg. 2: 76, [1340] and also p. 408.

² For 'Ād, see, e.g., 7: 65–72; for Iram, see 89: 7.

³ This is another name for Muḥammad, from the same root, *h-m-d*, which has the literal meaning of 'most praised'.

⁴ See Exeg. 2: 88, p. 402, and 2: 6, p. 107, respectively.

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بِشْمَا أَشْتَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
بَغْيًا أَنْ يَنْزِلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ
فَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ عَلَى غَضَبٍ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ

*bi'sa-ma 'shtaraw bi-hī anfusa-hum an yakfurū bi-mā anzala 'llāhu
baghyān an yunazzila 'llāhu min faḍli-hi 'alā man yashā'u min
'ibādi-hi fa-bā'u bi-ghaḍabin 'alā ghaḍabin wa-li-'l-kāfirīna 'adhābun
muhīnun*

How evil is the thing they have sold their souls for—their disbelief in what God sent down, grudging that God should send down of His bounty on whomsoever He will of His servants—, and they were laden with anger upon anger; and for unbelievers awaits a humiliating chastisement.

THE INTERPRETATION OF BI'SA-MA 'SHTARAW BI-HI ANFUSA-KUM AN YAKFURŪ BI-MĀ ANZALA 'LLĀHUBAGHYAN

(...)

Originally *bi'sa* (= how evil) was *ba'isa* from *bu's* (= wretchedness), then the -i- after the *hamza* (') was dropped and transferred to the *b*-. . . . Then it was made a sign of derogation and reproach, and is joined to *mā*.

§ Ṭabarī reports various opinions from Baṣran and Kūfan grammarians about the meaning and function of the *mā* in «*bi'sa-mā*» in relation to the rest of the sentence. He prefers the opinion which links «*mā*» with the pronoun -*hī* in «*ishtarū bi-hī anfusa-kum*» to give the sense 'Evil is the thing for which they sold their souls', and then takes the rest of the first part of this sentence to be an explanation of what this thing they sold their souls for was, i.e., disbelief in Muḥammad and his mission out of envy for the Arabs for having had a prophet sent among them.

(...)

As for «*baghyan*», He means by this 'hostilely', 'jealously'.

⇒ Al-Suddī:

They wronged (*baghaw*) Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, and were envious of him; they said: 'The Messengers were only from the Children of Israel; why should this one be from the Children of Ishmael?' They envied him that God should have sent His bounty down to whichever of His servants He wished. [1537; see also ⇒ Qatāda, 1536, ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1538, ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1539]

¶ The evil thing for which they sold their souls was the disbelief in what God sent down in His Book to Moses about the prophethood of Muḥammad, commanding 'them' to attest his truthfulness and follow him; 'they disbelieved' on account of God's sending His bounty—His wisdom, His signs, His prophethood—down to whichever of His servants He wished—i.e., to Muḥammad—'since they were' grudging and jealous of Muḥammad because he was a descendant of Ishmael and was not one of the Children of Israel.

QUESTION: How can the Jews have sold their souls for disbelief . . . ?
Can anything be sold for disbelief?

REPLY: Among the Arabs the meaning of 'buying' and 'selling' is a possessor's ceding 'ownership of' his property to someone else, for what he receives in exchange from him. Then the Arabs use it in the case of every person who gains something, good or bad, in return for his acts, and one says: 'How good is the thing he sold his soul for', or 'How evil is the thing he sold his soul for', meaning: 'How good a gain he has made' or 'How bad a gain he has made', when he brought down good or bad upon 'his soul' by striving for it. It is the same with the meaning of His words «How evil a thing have they sold their souls for», when they ruined and destroyed their souls by disbelieving in Muḥammad. God addressed them and the Arabs in their speech which they knew, saying «How evil a thing have they sold their souls for», meaning: How evil is what they gained for their souls by their effort; how evil a compensation have they received for their disbelief in God when they gave Muḥammad the lie, when they could have happily received God's reward and what he would have prepared for them

if they had believed in God and what He sent down to His prophets, instead of the Fire and what He prepared for them for their disbelief in this.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *AN YUNAZZILA 'LLĀHU MIN FAḌLI-HI*
'ALĀ MAN YASHĀ'U MIN 'IBĀDI-HI

§ Ṭabarī has already given the interpretation of this passage, and just mentions here some Traditions which confirm the interpretation. [⇒ 'Umar b. Qatāda al-Anṣārī, 1540, ⇒ Qatāda, 1541, ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1542, ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1543, ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1544—these last four are textually identical, and the text can be found above as part of 1527—, ⇒ 'Alī al-Azdī al-Bāriqī, 1545]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *FA-BĀ'Ū BI-GHAḌABIN*
'ALĀ GHAḌABIN

¶ After the Jews of the Children of Israel had prayed for Muḥammad's help 'to overcome the polytheists' . . . , and after they had told the people, before he had been sent, that he was a prophet who would be sent, when God sent him as a prophet with a Message they reverted and went back 'on their word', so they were laden with anger from God—which they merited for their unbelief in Muḥammad when he was sent, for denying his prophethood, for disclaiming that it was he whose description they had found in their scripture, stubbornly opposing him, grudgingly, jealous of him and the Arabs—over and above the previous anger which had come to them from God . . . for their previous unbelief towards Jesus, the son of Mary [⇒ 'Ikrima, 1547, 1548, 1549; ⇒ Qatāda, 1551; ⇒ Abu 'l-Āliya, 1553], or for their worship of the Calf [⇒ Al-Suddī, 1554], or for some other sin they had previously committed, for which they had merited wrath from God. [See ⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1546; ⇒ 'Ubaid b. 'Umair, 1555]

⇒ Al-Sha'bī:

On the Day of the Resurrection, the people will be at four stations: a man who was a believer in Jesus and believed in Muḥammad, may God bless them, will receive two wages; a man who was a disbeliever in Jesus but then believed in Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, will receive a single wage; a man who was a disbeliever in Jesus, and then disbelieved in Muḥammad will be laden with anger upon anger; and a man

who was a disbeliever in Jesus from the Arab polytheists and died in his unbelief before Muḥammad will be laden with anger. [1550]

⇒ Mujāhid:

«And they were laden with anger»—the Jews, for their alteration of the Torah before the advent of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace—«upon anger», «for» their disclaiming the prophet and disbelieving in what he brought. [1552]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-LI-'L-KĀFIRĪNA
'ADHĀBUN MUHĪNUN

¶ For anybody at all who denies the prophethood of Muḥammad there will be a punishment from God, either in the Hereafter, or in this world and the Hereafter; «it will be» «*muhīn*» «which means» that which disgraces the one on whom it falls, which shames him, which covers him in ignominy and humiliation.

QUESTION: What «kind of» punishment is not humiliating for the person who receives it, such that the humiliating «kind» can be for the unbelievers?

REPLY: The humbling «punishment» is that which, as we have explained, leaves the one who receives it with disgrace and shame in which he remains forever, never passing from his shame to everlasting glory and honour. It is for this that God singled out those who disbelieve in Him and in His Messengers. As for «the punishment» which does not humiliate the one who receives it, it is that which rectifies him. This is like the thief among Muslim people who steals something which entails amputation, and his hand is cut off; or the adulterer among them who commits adultery and the legal punishment is executed against him; and other examples of punishments and penalties which God has appointed as expiations for sins and with which those who commit them are punished. It is also like those among the people of Islam who commit major sins and are punished in the Hereafter according to the offenses which they committed, so as to be purified of their sins, and then they enter the Garden. Although all this is punishment, it is not humiliating for the one who is

punished, since God's punishing him is in order to purify him of his misdeeds; then He brings him to the source of glory and honour, and causes him to dwell forever in the felicity of the Gardens.

2: 91

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا نُوْمِنُ بِمَا
أَنزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا وَرَاءَهُ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا
لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ
كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

*wa-idhā qīla la-hum āminū bi-mā anzala 'llāhu qālū nu'minu bi-mā
unzila 'alay-nā wa-yakfurūna bi-mā warā'a-hu wa-huwa 'l-ḥaqqu
muṣaddiqan li-mā ma'a-hum qul fa-li-ma taqtulūna anbiyā'a 'llāhi min
kuntum mu'minīna*

And when they were told: 'Believe in that which God has sent down', they said: 'We believe in what was sent down to us'; and they disbelieve in what is beyond that, yet it is the truth confirming what is with them. Say: 'Why then did you used to slay the prophets of God in times past, if you are believers?'

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-IDHĀ QĪLA LA-HUM
ĀMINŪ BI-MĀ ANZALA 'LLĀHU
QĀLŪ NU' MINU BI-MĀ UNZILA 'ALAY-NĀ

¶ AND when the Jews of the Children of Israel who were in the vicinity of the abode of emigration of the Messenger of God were told: «'Believe in»—i.e., attest the truth of—«that which God has sent down»—i.e., the Qur'ān which God sent down to Muḥammad—«they said: 'We believe in»—i.e., we attest the truth of—«what was sent down to us»—i.e., the Torah which God sent down to Moses.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-YAKFURŪNA BI-MĀ WARĀ'A-HUM

¶ They deny «anything besides that»—i.e., besides the Torah.

The interpretation of «*warā'*» in this place is *siwa* (=besides, other than) . . . ; so the meaning of 'this passage' . . . is: 'And they disbelieve in¹ anything besides the Torah, in any of God's scriptures which He sent down to His Messengers after that. [=Qatāda, 1556, ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1557, ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1558]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-HUWA 'L-ḤAQQU
MUŠADDIQAN LI-MĀ MA'A-HUM

¶ The Book which He sent down to His prophet, which is other than the scripture which was sent down to them, is the truth 'confirming the scripture that they have [=Al-Suddī, 1559]¹. And He means by that the Qur'ān which He sent down to Muḥammad.

This is a statement by God that they denied the truth of the Torah, in the same way as they denied the truth of the Evangel and the Furqān, stubbornly resisting God, opposing His command, rebellious against His Messengers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF QUL FA-LI-MA TAQTULŪNA
ANBIYĀ'A 'LLĀHI MIN QABLU IN KUNTUM MU'MINĪNA

¶ Say, O Muḥammad, to the^{se} Jews . . . : 'Why did you use to slay His prophets if, O community of Jews, you are believers in what God sent down to you, for God forbade killing them in the Book which He sent down to you, rather He commanded you there to follow and obey them and to attest to their truthfulness?'

This is God's denial of the truthfulness of their saying «'We believe in what was sent down to us», and His condemnation of them. [=Al-Suddī, 1560]

§ Ṭabarī discussed the objection that what Muḥammad is told to say begins with a verb, «*taqtulūna*», in the tense which signifies the future (or the present), but continues with a phrase, «*min qablu*», which indicates that the action was in the past. He mentions a Baṣran and a Kūfan grammarian who agree that the verb denotes the past, but disagree in reasoning about why this is so. Ṭabarī relies on previous explanations he has given in similar contexts:¹ God stated the past deeds of the Jews in the form of an address to those Jews who were contemporary with Muḥammad.

¶ 'If you believe in what God sent to you, as you claim'—by this

He means the Jews who knew the Messenger of God, as well as their ancestors—'if they were and you are, as you, O Jews, claim, believers'—He blamed the 'Jews contemporary with Muḥammad' for their forebears' slaying of His prophets when they said . . . «'We believe in what was sent down to us'», because they were successors to the forefathers . . . and were pleased with what 'their forefathers' had done—'if, as you claim, you believe in what was sent down to you, why do you profess solidarity with the murderers of God's prophets? Why are you pleased with what they did?'

¹ See, *inter alia*, Exeg. 2: 83, p. 426, and n. 8.

2: 92

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِن
بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

*wa-la-qad jā'a-kum Mūsā bi-'l-baiyanāti thumma 'ttakhadhtumu 'l-'ijla
min ba'di-hi wa-antum ṣālimūna*

And Moses came to you with the clear signs, then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and were evil-doers.

¶ HE came to you¹, O community of Jews of the Children of Israel,¹ with the clear signs demonstrating his truthfulness and soundness and his prophethood, such as the staff which changed into a manifest snake, and his hand which he took out 'of his tunic' white to those who beheld, the separating of the sea and its bed becoming a dry way for him, and the locusts and lice and frogs, and the rest of the signs which demonstrated his truthfulness and soundness and his prophethood.

God calls them 'clear' signs, because they made clear to those who saw them that they were miracles which no man could bring without God making 'these things' subservient to him. . . .

(...)

. . . He said «after him», because they took the Calf to themselves 'as a god' after Moses had gone away from them, on his way to keep his appointment with his Lord.¹

§ Tabarī admits alternatively that the pronoun in «ba'di-hi» may refer to Moses' coming with the clear signs.

(...)

¹ See Exeg. 2: 51, p. 308-9.

2: 93

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا
ءَاتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَأَسْمِعُوا قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأَشْرَبُوا
فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ قُلْ بِشِمَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ بِهِ
إِيمَانُكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

*wa-idh akhadhnā mīthāqa-kum wa-rafa'nā fauqa-kumu 'l-tūra khudhū
mā ātainā-kum bi-qūwatin wa-'sma'ū qālū sami'nā wa-'ašainā wa-
ushribū fī qulūbi-himu 'l-'ijla bi-kufri-him qul bi'sa-mā ya'muru-kum
bi-hī imānu-kum in kuntum mu'minīna*

And when We took compact with you, and raised over you the Mount: 'Take forcefully what We have given you and give ear.' They said: 'We hear, and rebel'; and they were made to drink the Calf into their hearts for their unbelief. Say: 'How evil is the thing your faith bids you to, if you are believers.'

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-IDH AKHADHNĀ MĪTHĀQA-KUM
WA-RAFA'NĀ FAUQA-KUMU 'L-TŪRA
KHUDHŪ MĀ ĀTAINĀKUM BI-QŪWATIN
WA-'SMA'Ū QĀLŪ SAMI'NĀ WA-'AŠAINĀ*

¶ AND remember when We took covenant with you to take the Torah We had given you, which was sent down to you to do what I had commanded therein and to refrain from what I had forbidden you therein, diligently and eagerly; and you gave your compact to act according to it when We raised the mountain above you. '...

Listen to what you have been ordered to do, accept it obediently.'—It is like someone saying to another who gives him an order: 'I hear and obey.'...

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-USHRIBŪ FĪ QULŪBI-HIMU
'L-'IJLA BI-KUFRI-HIM*

§ Tabarī records a disagreement among the interpreters about the phrase «they were made to drink the Calf into their hearts». One opinion was that it meant that they were given water to drink in which filings of gold from the Calf were suspended [⇒Al-Suddī, 1564 (see 937, of which this is part); ⇒Ibn Juraij, 1565], but he rejects this on the grounds that Arabs do not speak of water being drunk 'into the heart'. Instead, he prefers the opinion which interprets the locution as a metaphor for becoming possessed by the love of something to the point at which it 'takes over one's heart' [⇒Qatāda, 1561; ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1562; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1563], which, fully expressed, would be 'to be made to drink love of the Calf into their hearts'. This conforms to the usage of the Arabs, and the word *hubb* (=love) is omitted because it is readily understood. He illustrates this kind of ellipsis in the Qur'ān by quoting 7: 163 and 12: 82.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *QUL BI'SA-MĀ YA'MURU-KUM BI-HĪ
ĪMĀNU-KUM IN KUNTUM MU'MINĪNA*

¶ Say, O Muḥammad, to the Jews of the Children of Israel: 'How evil a thing does your faith bid you to, if it bids you to slay the prophets and Messengers of God, to give the lie to His Books, to deny what came from Him. Their «faith» means their attesting the truth of what they claimed, that they believed in God's scripture.¹ . . . God denies the truth of what they said, because the Torah forbids all of this, and commands the opposite. . . .

¹ See Exeg. 2: 3, p. 95.

2:94

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّنْ دُونِ
النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

*qul in kānat la-kumu 'l-dāru 'l-ākhiratu 'inda 'llāhi khālīṣatan min dūni
'l-nāsi fa-tamannawu 'l-mauta in kumtum ṣādiqīna*

Say: 'If the Last Abode with God is yours alone, and not other people's, then wish for death—if you speak truly.'

THIS verse is one of those by which God vindicated His prophet, Muḥammad, before the Jews who were in the vicinity of his abode of emigration¹, Medina¹, and compromised their rabbis and learned men. That is to say that God commanded His prophet to call them to a fair judgement between him and them in connection with the difference between them, just as God commanded him to summon the other group of the Christians, when they differed with him about Jesus and quarrelled about him, to a decision by mutual cursing (*mubāhala*).¹

¶ 'Muḥammad¹ said to the group of Jews: 'If you speak the truth, then wish for death. This will not be harmful to you, if you are truthful in your claim to faith and to the nearness of your station to God. Nay, if you are granted your desire for death when you wish 'for it', you will attain repose from the hardship and fatigue of this world and from the discomfort of its life, and gain nearness to God in His Gardens—if the matter is as you claim, that the Last Abode is yours alone and not ours. But if you are not given it, the people will know that you are lying and that we are telling the truth in our claim, and our situation and yours will become revealed to them.'

But the Jews refused to respond to the Prophet concerning this, because they knew that if they wished for death they would perish and leave this world of theirs, they would end up with the shame of eternal dwelling in their Hereafter. This is just like the refusal of the group of Christians . . . 'to take part in' the mutual cursing.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

The Messenger of God said: 'If the Jews had desired death, they

would have died, and they would have seen their places in the Fire. And if those who engaged in mutual cursing with the Messenger of God had come out, they would have returned to find neither family nor property.' [1566]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

If they had desired death, everyone of them would have choked on his spittle. [1567, part of the same Tradition as 1566; see also 1568–70]

Thus were the deceit, slander, and injustice of the Jews against the Messenger of God revealed to those who found the position of the Jews ambiguous at that time, and the proof of the Messenger of God and the proof of his Companions against them became clear; nor has it ceased, praise be to God, to be evident against them and against the people of other religious communities besides them.

The Messenger of God was commanded to say to them «'Then wish for death—if you speak truly'», because, as we have been told, they had said: «'We are the sons of God, and His beloved ones'» (5: 18), and «'None shall enter the Garden except those who are Jews or Christians.'» (2: 111) And God said to His prophet, Muḥammad: Say to them: 'If you speak the truth in what you claim, desire death.' Thus God made their deceit clear when they refused to wish for death, and caused the proof of the Messenger of God to succeed.

[T]: CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS REVELATION: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that they were commanded to wish it by way of a supplication against whichever of their two groups were lying.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

God told His prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: «Say: 'If the Last Abode with God is yours alone, and not other people's, then wish for death—if you speak truly'», i.e., 'Call down death upon whichever of the two groups is the greater liar'. [1571]

SECOND OPINION: Others [⇒Qatāda, 1572; ⇒Abu 'l-Āliya, 1573; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1574] 'gave the Jews' two claims in 5: 18 and 2: 111 as the cause¹. . . .

¶ Say, O Muḥammad: 'If the felicity and pleasures of the Last Abode² are yours before God, O community of Jews, . . .'

He contented Himself with using the word «Abode» without mentioning its felicity, because those to whom the verse is addressed knew 'that this was' what was meant.

(...)

§ Tabarī says that «and not other people's» ostensibly refers to all the rest of mankind, but he quotes a Tradition from Ibn 'Abbās [1576] to the effect that the Jews meant that only Muḥammad and his Companions were excluded. He also quotes Ibn 'Abbās [1577] as saying that «then wish for death» here means 'then ask for death'. Tabarī suggests that Ibn 'Abbās interpreted the meaning thus in the belief that a request to God was implied.

¹ See 2: 61, and Ibn: Ishāq (1955), pp. 270-7.

² See Exeg. 2: 4, p. 101.

2:95

وَلَنْ يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ

wa-lan yatamannaw-hu abadan bi-mā qaddamat aidī-him wa-'llāhu
'alīmun bi-'l-ẓālimīna

But they will never wish for it, because of what their hands have done before; God knows the evil-doers;

THIS is a statement by God about the Jews and their abhorrence of death, and their refusal to respond to the challenge to them to wish for death, on account of their knowledge that if they did this the Threat would come down upon them and they would die, and because they knew that Muḥammad was a Messenger from God sent to them [⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1582], and that they had given him the lie while he informed them of nothing which would not come true as he had informed them [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1578 and 1579]. So they were wary of wishing for death, fearing that God's punishment for the sins they had accumulated would befall them [⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1580].

As for His words «because of that their hands have done before (= lit., have put forward)», by this He means: Because of what their hands had already done [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1581]. This is a trope, in the manner of those used by the Arabs in their speech. They say of a man who is arrested for some offence or crime he has committed, and is

punished for it: 'This is meted out to you for "what your hand has committed (*bi-mā janat yadā-ka*)"', for "what your hand has gathered (*bi-mā kasabat yadā-ka*)", for "what your hand has put forward (*bi-mā qaddamat yadā-ka*)"', and this is attributed to the hand, although perhaps the crime that was committed and for which punishment is merited was 'done' with the tongue or the pudenda, or with some other part of the body besides the hand. These things are attributed to the hand because the greatest crimes of people 'are committed' with their hands. . . .

Because of this, He said «But they will never wish for it, because of what their hands have done before», meaning thereby: The Jews will never wish for death because of their unbelief in God which they previously exhibited in their lives when they opposed His command and disobeyed Him 'by not' following Muḥammad and what he brought from God, although they had found him written down before them in the Torah, and knew that he was a delegated prophet. God attributed the jealousy towards Muḥammad, the injustice against him, the giving him the lie, and the denial of his Message, which was in their hearts and which their souls harboured and their tongues uttered, to their hands, and 'said' that these were things their hands had done before, because the Arabs knew the meaning of this in their speech and discourse; for God sent down the Qur'ān in their tongue and language.

(...)

¶ God knows the sinners¹ among mankind—be they from Jews, the Christians, or any other religious community—and what they do.

¹ See Exeg. 2: 35, p. 429.

2:96

وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَخْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَى حَيَاةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ
أَشْرَكُوا يَوْمَ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ
بِمُزَحَّزِحِهِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ أَنْ يُعَمَّرَ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ

*wa-la-tajidanna-hum ahraṣa 'l-nāsi 'alā ḥayātin wa-mina 'lladhīna
ashrakū yawaddu aḥadu-hum law yu'ammara alfa sanatin wa-mā
huwa bi-muzaḥzihi-hi min 'l-'adhābi an yu'ammara wa-'llāhu
baṣīrun bi-mā ya'malūna*

and you shall find them the eagerest of men to live, even more than the polytheists; each of them wishes his life might be prolonged a thousand years, yet a prolongation of his life shall not remove him from the chastisement. God sees the things they do.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-TAJIDANNA-HUM AHRAṢA
'L-NĀSI 'ALĀ ḤAYĀTIN*

¶ O Muḥammad, you shall find that the eagerest of men for life in this world, and those who deem death the most abhorrent, are the Jews. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1583; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1584; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1585; ⇒Mujāhid, 1586]

They abhorred death because they knew of the long shame and ignominy that will be theirs in the Hereafter.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MINA 'LLADHĪNA ASHRAKŪ*

¶ «[E]ven more than the polytheists»—even more eager for life than the polytheists. [⇒Ibn Zaid, 1589]...

God described the Jews as being the eagerest of men to live, because they knew what had been prepared for them in the Hereafter for their unbelief, which the polytheists did not acknowledge; so they abhorred death more than the polytheists who did not believe in the Awakening, and they knew the chastisement that awaited them there....

It is said that the polytheists 'mentioned here'... were the Magians who did not believe in the Awakening. [⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1587; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1588. Ibn 'Abbās, 1590, was of the opinion that they were those who denied the Awakening.]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *YAWADDU AḤADU-HUM LAW
YU'AMMARU ALFA SANATIN*

¶ Each of the polytheists—having no hope that, when his world perishes and the days of his life come to an end, he will be resurrected, or kept alive, or 'enter into' joy or happiness—wishes that his life might be prolonged by a thousand years; they even made their 'formula of' greeting each other 'Ten thousand years!', avid as they were for life.

⇒Ibn Jubair:

This was what the 'Persian' polytheists said to each other when they sneezed: 'May you live for a thousand years!' [1592; see also ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1591 and 1596]¹

⇒Qatāda:

Sin made them love a long life. [1593; see also ⇒Ibn Najjīh, 1594]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MĀ HUWA BI-MIZAḤZIHI-HI
MINA 'L-'ADHĀBI AN YU'AMMARA*

(...)

§ Ṭabarī quotes opinions about the role of the pronoun «*huwa*» at the beginning of this passage. He prefers the view that it has a syntactic, but no semantic, function. He rejects the view [⇒Abū 'Āliya, 1597; ⇒Al-Rabī', 1598; ⇒Ibn Zaid, 1599] that the particle *an* should be read *in*, meaning «if their life were prolonged».

(...)

¶ Long life will not exclude him from God's chastisement... for life must have an end and he will end up with God. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1600; ⇒Abu 'l-'Āliya, 1601; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1602]

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'LLĀHU BAṢĪRUN
BI-MĀ YA'MALŪNA

¶ Nothing of what they do is hidden from Him, rather He is aware of it all; He remembers it so that He may thereby give them a taste of the chastisement in requital for it.

(...)

¹ In all three Traditions the greeting is quoted in Persian; in the first one from Ibn 'Abbās, the wording is somewhat garbled, but would appear to be a New Year's greeting.

2:97

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ
اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*qul man kāna 'adūwan li-Jibrīla fa-inna-hu nazzala-hu 'alā qalbi-ka
bi-idhni 'llāhi muṣaddiqan li-mā baina yaday-hi wa-hudan wa-bushrā
li-'l-mu'minīna*

Say: 'Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel—he it was that brought it down upon your heart by the leave of God, confirming what was before it, a guidance and good tidings for the believers.

THE INTERPRETATION OF QUL MAN KĀNA 'ADŪWAN LI-JIBRĪLA
FA-INNA-HU NAZZALA-HU 'ALĀ QALBI-KA BI-IDHNI 'LLĀHI

THERE is a consensus of all the interpreters that this verse was sent down as a rejoinder to the Jews of the Children of Israel when they claimed that Gabriel was their enemy and Michael was their supporter (*walīy*).

[T]: CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS REVELATION: FIRST OPINION:
Some of them said that they said this on account of a dispute that arose between them and the Messenger of God concerning his prophethood.

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

A group of Jews was in the presence of the Messenger of God, and

they said: 'O Abu 'l-Qāsim, tell us about 'some' specific things we shall ask you about which only a prophet could know.' The Messenger of God said: 'Ask what you like, but concede me God's covenanted protection and 'the agreement' which Jacob took with his sons: should I tell you something you 'already' know, then you will follow me according to Islam.' They said: 'You shall have that.' So the Messenger of God said: 'Ask me what you will.'

They said: 'Tell us about the four specific things about which we shall 'now' ask you. Tell us which food Israel forbade himself before the Torah was sent down.¹ Tell us what a woman's and a man's 'seminal' fluids are like, and how the male and the female issue from them. Tell us about how this illiterate prophet 'who is mentioned in our scripture' sleeps, and 'tell us' which angel is his supporter.' The Messenger of God said: 'God's covenant is upon you: if I inform you 'of what you already know' then you shall follow me.' So they gave him the covenant and compact which he wanted.

Then he said: 'By Him who sent down the Torah to Moses, I adjure you, do you know that Israel had a severe illness, and his sickness went on for a long time; so he took a vow that if God relieved him of his sickness he would make his favourite food and drink unlawful for himself, and his favourite food was the meat of camels (...) and his favourite drink was their milk?' They said: 'O God, yes indeed.'

Then the Messenger of God said: 'I take God as 'my' witness against you, and I adjure you by Allāh, than whom there is no other god, who sent down the Torah to Moses, do you know that a man's fluid is white and viscid, and a woman's fluid is yellow and watery, and that whichever of the two predominates, the child will be 'determined' in its likeness by God's leave: if the man's fluid predominates over the woman's, the child will be male by God's leave, and if the woman's fluid predominates over the man's, the child will be female by God's leave?'² They said: 'O God, yes indeed.'

He said: 'O God, be 'my' witness.' Then he said: 'I adjure you by Him who sent down the Torah to Moses, do you know that this illiterate prophet's eyes sleep, but his heart does not?' They said: 'O God, yes indeed.'

He said: 'O God, be 'my' witness.' They said: 'Tell us now which of the angels is your supporter. On that depends whether

we shall follow you or separate from you.' He said: 'My supporter is Gabriel, and God has never sent any prophet whose supporter he was not.' They said: 'For this we separate from you; if your supporter had been any other angel besides him, we should have followed you and testified to your truthfulness.' He said: 'What prevents you from testifying to 'Gabriel's' truthfulness?' They said: 'He is our enemy.' Then God sent down «Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel—he it was that brought it down upon your heart by the leave of God» as far as 'the end of verse 101'. . . . [1605]

⇒Shahr b. Hawshab al-Ash'arī:

A group of Jews came to the Messenger of God, and said: 'O Muḥammad, tell us about four 'things' we shall ask you about; if you do, we shall follow you and testify to your truthfulness and believe in you.' So the Messenger of God said: 'Let God's covenant and compact be upon you for this: if I tell you this, will you testify to my truthfulness?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'So ask what seems appropriate to you.' They said: 'Tell us how a child can resemble its mother when the sperm comes from the man?' The Messenger of God said: 'I adjure you by Allāh and by His days among the Children of Israel, do you know that a man's sperm is white and viscid, and a woman's sperm is yellow and watery, and whichever of the two predominates over the other, the likeness will be of it?'³ They said: 'Yes, indeed.'

They said: 'Tell us how you sleep.' He said: 'I adjure you by Allāh and His days among the Jews, do you know that this illiterate prophet's eyes sleep but his heart does not?' They said: 'O God, yes indeed.' He said: 'O God, be 'my' witness.'

They said: 'Tell us which food Israel forbade himself before the Torah was sent down.' He said: 'Do you know that his favourite food and drink was the milk and the meat of camels. He was suffering from some complaint, and God relieved him of it, so he forbade himself his favourite food and drink out of thanks to God, and forbade himself the meat and the milk of camels?' They said: 'O God, yes indeed.'

They said: 'Tell us about the spirit.' He said: 'I adjure you by Allāh and His days among the Children of Israel, do you know that it is Gabriel, and that it is he who comes to me?' They said: 'Yes, but he is an enemy of ours; he is an angel who brings

violence and the spilling of blood. If it were not for this, we would follow you.' So God sent down concerning them «Say: 'Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel—he it was that brought it down upon your heart by the leave of God, confirming what was before it'» as far as 'the end of verse 101'. [1606. See also ⇒Al-Qāsim b. Abī Bazza, 1607]

SECOND OPINION: Others said rather that they said this on account of a dispute which took place between them and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb concerning the Prophet.

⇒Al-Sha'bī:

'Umar stopped at al-Rawḥā', and saw some men hurrying to some rocks to pray on them. He said: 'What are these 'people doing'?' They said: 'They claim that the Messenger of God prayed here.' He did not like this, and said: 'What is this? The 'time for' prayer came upon the Messenger of God at a river, so he prayed and then set off and left'; that is all'.

Then he started to narrate to them, and said: 'I have been present with the Jews on the day of the study of their scripture (*midrās*), and I was amazed at how the Torah confirmed the truth of the Furqān, and how the Furqān confirmed the truth of the Torah. When I was with them one day they said: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, there is no one among your companions whom we love more than you." I said: "Why is that?" They said: "You call upon us and visit us." (...) I said: "I visit you, and am surprised at how the Furqān confirms the truth of the Torah, and how the Torah confirms the truth of the Furqān." (...) Then the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, passed by, and they said: "O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, that is your master, so join him." (...) Thereupon I said to them: "I adjure you by Allāh, than whom there is no other god, by His truth which He asked you to guard, and by the scripture with which He entrusted you, do you know that he is the Messenger of God?" (...) Then they fell silent.

(...) 'Then one of their learned and important men said: "He has seriously entreated you, so answer him." They said: "You are our scholar and master, you should answer him." He said: "Well then, since you adjured us by Him, 'yes,' we do know that he is the Messenger of God." (...) I said: "Woe unto you! In that case you will perish!" They said: "We shall not perish." (...) I said:

"Why not? You know that he is the Messenger of God, but you do not then follow him and attest his truthfulness." They said: "Among the angels we have 'one who is' an enemy and one who keeps the peace with us. Our enemy has been associated with 'Muḥammad'." (...) I said: "Who is your enemy? And who keeps the peace with you?" They said: "Our enemy is Gabriel, and the one who keeps the peace with us is Michael." (...) I said: "Why do you feud with Gabriel? And why are you at peace with Michael?" They said: "Gabriel is the angel of harshness, ruthlessness, poverty, severity, punishment, and so forth, while Michael is the angel of kindness, compassion, moderation, and so forth." (...) I said: "What is their station from their Lord?" They said: "One of them is on His right, and the other on His left." (...) I said: "By Allāh, than whom there is no other god, they and the One who is between them are the enemy of him who feuds with them and the man of peace towards him who keeps peace with them. Gabriel cannot be at peace with Michael's enemy, nor can Michael with Gabriel's enemy."

(...) 'Then I stood up and followed the Prophet. I joined him outside a palm grove of the Banū So-and-so, and he said to me: "O Ibn Khaṭṭāb, shall I not recite to you some verses which have come down?" And he recited «Say: "Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel—he it was that brought it down upon your heart by the leave of God, confirming what was before it»" (...) I said: "By my father and my mother, O Messenger of God, and by Him who sent you with the Truth, I came wanting to give you the report, but I hear that the Kind, the All-informed, has reported it to you before me." [1608, 1609; and 1614. See also ⇒Qatāda, 161–12; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1613; ⇒Ibn Abī Lailā, 1615; ⇒'Aṭā', 1616]

¶ God says to His prophet: 'O Muḥammad, tell the community of the Jews of the Children of Israel who claimed that Gabriel was their enemy because he was an 'angel' of attacks, chastisement and punishments, not an 'angel' of revelation, sending down mercy, and who refused to follow you, denied your prophethood, and rejected My signs and the clear proof of My rule which you brought, because Gabriel is your supporter, the bearer of My revelation to you, . . . 'tell them': Any man who is an enemy of Gabriel, and denies that he is the bearer of God's revelation to His prophets, the keeper of His mercy—I am close to him and a friend, and I acknowledge that he is the bearer of

revelation to His prophets and Messengers; it is he who brings down God's revelation to my heart from his Lord, by God's leave to him to do this, thereby fortifying my heart and strengthening my mind. [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1617; ⇒Qatāda, 1618; ⇒Al-Rabī', 1619]

§ Ṭabarī raises the point that in this passage God said «he it was that brought it down upon your heart», meaning Muḥammad's heart, although this was something which He ordered Muḥammad to say to the Jews. Why then does He not say: Say: 'He it was that brought it down upon my heart'? According to Ṭabarī, it would have been perfectly correct to have said 'my heart' here, but 'your heart' is just as acceptable. It is all the same in Arabic, he says, in such a situation of telling someone what he should say to another, whether one uses the first person, as would the person who is being told what to say when he says it, or uses the second person, as when addressing him directly. In the second case, a form of indirect speech is being used, but in Arabic there is no need to insert a particle to indicate this, i.e., to say 'Tell him *that* . . .

As for Gabriel, the Arabs have two names for him. The people of the Hijāz say 'Jibrīl' and 'Mīkāl', and this is how most of the reciters of Medina and Baṣra read it. However, 'the people of Banū' Tamīm and 'Banū' Qais, and 'some of the people of' Najd say 'Jabra'īl' and 'Mīkā'īl', and most of the Kūfan reciters read it like this. ‡

It is said that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and 'Abd Allāh b. Kathīr used to recite 'Jabrīl', but this reading is not acceptable, because 'the form' *fa'īl* does not exist among the Arabs. Some, however, have preferred this 'reading', and have claimed that it is a non-Arabic name, like . . . Samwīl (= Samuel). ‡ The Banū Asad say 'Jibrīn', and some Arabs are said to add an *alif* to 'Jibrīl' and to say 'Jibrāyīl' and 'Mīkāyīl'. It is also narrated that Yaḥyā b. Ya'mar recited 'Jabra'ill'.

Jabr and *mīk* are two nouns, the first meaning 'slave (= 'abd)', and the second 'little slave ('ubaid)'. As for *īl*, this is 'God'.⁴ [⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1620, 1621, 1622; also ⇒'Abd Allāh b. al-Ḥārith, 1623 (*īl* is Hebrew for 'God'); ⇒'Ikrima, 1624, 1628; ⇒'Alī b. Husain, 1625–7]

This is the interpretation of those who read 'Jabra'īl', and it is also, God willing, the meaning of those who read 'Jibrīl'.

As for the interpretation of those who read 'Jabra'ill' 'and 'Mīkā'ill', they intend . . . to attach *jabr* and *mīkā* to a name of God by which He is called in Arabic, not in Syriac or Hebrew. That is to say that *ill* is 'God' in Arabic, as 'in 9: 10' . . . where a group of the learned were of the opinion that «*illan*» 'means' 'God'.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF MUṢADDAQAN LI-MĀ

BAINA YADAY-HI

By His words «confirming what was before it» He means the Qur'ān, and «confirming» refers back to the «it» in «that brought it down upon your heart», expressing a state.

¶ Gabriel brought down the Qur'ān upon your heart, O Muḥammad, confirming what was before the Qur'ān—confirming God's scriptures which preceded it and which descended on His Messengers who came before Muḥammad; it confirms the¹se preceding scriptures¹ because its meanings agree with their meanings as regards the command to follow Muḥammad and what he brought from God. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1630; ⇒ Qatāda, 1631; ⇒ Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1632]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-HUDAN WA-BUSHRĀ

LI-'L-MU'MINĪNA

By His words «a guidance» He means 'a demonstration, a proof'. God calls it a «guidance» because the believer is rightly guided by it when he takes it as a guide which he follows, a leader whose command and prohibition, what it makes lawful and what it makes unlawful, he obeys. The 'guide' (*hādī*) of anything is what goes in front of it. . . .

As for «good tidings (*bushran*)» . . . , God informs His believing servants that the Qur'ān is good tidings from Him to them, because it brings them news of the honour He has prepared for them with Him in His Gardens and of the reward that awaits them in their Abode of Return (*ma'ād*). This is the good tidings which God brings the believers in His Book, for *bishāra*, in the speech of the Arabs, means: Informing a man of something which gladdens him which he did not know before he hears it, or learns of it, from someone else.⁵

⇒ Qatāda:

'The Qur'ān is' «a guidance and good tidings for the believers» because when the believer hears the Qur'ān he memorizes it and remembers it, and he profits from it and relies upon it. He believes in what God has promised, concerning which He has given His word, and is certain of it. [1633]

¹ See 3: 93.

² See Exeg. 2: 25, n. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See also Exeg. 2: 40, p. 269.

⁵ See Exeg. 2: 25, p. 174.

2: 98

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

*man kāna 'adūwan li-'llāhi wa-malā'ikati-hi wa-rusuli-hī wa-jibrīla
wa-Mikāla fa-inna 'llāha 'adūwun li-'l-kāfirīna*

Whosoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His Messengers, and Gabriel, and Michael—surely God is an enemy to the unbelievers.'

THIS is a statement from God that whoever is hostile to Him and hostile to all His angels and Messengers is an enemy to God; it is an announcement from him that whoever is an enemy to Gabriel is an enemy to Him and an enemy to Michael, and an enemy to all His angels and Messengers. For those whom God names in this verse are the friends (*awliyā*) of God, the people of obedience to Him, and whoever is an enemy to a friend of God is an enemy to God and has joined battle with Him, and whoever is an enemy to God is an enemy of all the people of obedience to Him and all those close to Him. . . . Thus He said to the Jews, who had said that Gabriel was their enemy among the angels and Michael their friend, «Whosoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His Messengers, and Gabriel, and Michael—surely God is an enemy to the unbelievers», because a enemy to Gabriel is an enemy to all those close to God. So He informed them that whoever was an enemy to Gabriel was an enemy to all those He mentioned—His angels, His Messengers, and Michael—, and similarly that an enemy to one of His Messengers was an enemy to God and to every friend.

⇒ 'Ubaid Allāh al-'Atakī:

A man of the Quraish said: 'The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked the Jews: "I am asking you about your scripture which you recite, whether you have found in it 'anywhere' that Jesus, the son of Mary, gave news of me, that a Messenger whose name is Aḥmad would come to you?" They said: "O God, we have indeed found you in our scripture, but we dislike you because you seize property unlawfully and shed

blood." So God sent down «Whosoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His Messengers, and Gabriel, and Michael—surely God is an enemy to the unbelievers.» [1634]

⇒'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Lailā:

A Jew met 'Umar and said to him: 'Gabriel, whom your friend mentions, is an enemy to us.' So 'Umar said to him: 'Whosoever is an enemy to God and His angels and His Messengers, and Gabriel, and Michael—surely God is an enemy to the unbelievers.' (...) It was sent down on the tongue of 'Umar. [1635]

This 'latter' Tradition demonstrates that God sent down this verse as a rebuke for the Jews and their disbelief in Muḥammad, telling them that God was the enemy of whoever was an enemy to Muḥammad, and that all those people who disbelieved in Muḥammad were unbelievers in God, denying His signs.

§ Ṭabarī adds a few precisions about this verse. Gabriel and Michael are specifically mentioned by name, although they are both angels, and hence included in the general reference to 'angels', because the claims of the Jews were to do with them specifically. And God is mentioned specifically at the end of the verse, even though He has been mentioned before, so that there should be no ambiguity as to which of the names previously given is meant.

2: 99

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَا إِلَّا الْفَاسِقُونَ

wa-la-qad anzalnā ilay-ka āyātin bayyinātin wa mā yakfuru bi-hā illa 'l-fāsiqūna

And We have sent down to you signs, clear signs, and none disbelieves in them save the ungodly.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-QAD ANZALNĀ ILAY-KA
ĀYĀTIN BAYYINĀTIN*

¶ WE have sent down to you, O Muḥammad, manifest signs proving your prophethood. These signs are the secrets of the knowledge of the Jews which the Book of God, which He sent down

to Muḥammad, contains. . . . 'They are clear signs' to whoever is just to himself, to whomever envy and iniquity have not prevailed upon to destroy his soul, because in the disposition of everyone who has a sound disposition there is testimony to the truth of whoever brings the like of the clear signs, which I have described, which Muḥammad brought without any learning from anyone nor taking anything of it from any human. [⇒ Ibn 'Abbās, 1636]

⇒ Ibn 'Abbās:

Ibn Sūriyā al-Fiṭyūnī said to the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace: 'O Muḥammad, you have not brought us anything we knew, and God has not sent down to you any clear sign whereby we might follow you.' So God sent down «And We have sent down to you signs, clear signs, and none disbelieves in them save the ungodly.» [1637, 1638]

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-MĀ YAKFURU BI-HĀ
ILLA 'L-FĀSIQŪNA*

¶ «'A'nd none disbelieves in them»—and no one denies them—«save the ungodly».¹
(...)

¹ For the interpretation of *kufr* (=unbelief) and *fisq* (=ungodliness), Ṭabarī refers back to *Exeg.* 2: 6 and *Exeg.* 2: 26, respectively.

2: 100

أَوْكُلَّمَا عَاهَدُوا عَهْدًا نَبَذَهُ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُ
يَوْمِئِذٍ

'ahdan nabadha-hu farīqun min-hum bal
ketharu-hum lā yu'minūna

have made a covenant, has a party of them
y, but most of them are unbelievers.

ions on the function of *-wa-* in «*a-wa-kullu-mā*»: one
om a Kūfan, grammarian. Since the Baṣran bases his
inadmissible for Ṭabarī, that there is redundancy in
in favour of the other opinion, which says that it
ceeding mention of the compact in verse 93, and that
urns it into a question.

, it is the compact which the Children of Israel
nd again to act according to what was in the
of them then violated time and again. So God
at they did, and thereby reproached their
g their path in part of the covenant and compact
rom them: to believe in Muḥammad. For they
he description of him that was in the Torah.

of the Children of Israel make a covenant
ee to a compact, why does a party of them break
te it?

of God, may God bless him and grant him
he mentioned the compact that had been
nd what God had covenanted with them
k b. al-Ṣaif said: 'By God. He did not make
about Muḥammad, nor did he take any
cerning him.' Then God sent down «Why,
made a covenant, has a party of them broken
nem are unbelievers.» [1639, 1640]

The original meaning of *nabdh* in the speech of the Arabs is 'to throw' Thus when raisins or dates are thrown into a vessel and are treated with water, it is called *nabīdh*: . . . originally it was *manbūdh*, but then it was 'changed to' . . . *nabīdh*.[‡]

Thus the meaning of His words «*nabadha-hu farīqun min-hum*» is: 'Why' has a party of them thrown it away, abandoned it, broken it. [⇒Qatāda, 1641]

⇒Ibn Juraij:

There was no covenant on earth which they made with Him which they did not violate, which they did not covenant one day and violate the next. (...) In 'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd's recitation it is: «*naqaḍa-hu* (= violate it) *farīqun min-hum*». [1642]

(...)

¶ «Nay, but most of them are unbelievers»—Nay, but most of these—who, whenever they make a covenant with God and agree to a compact with Him, a group of them violates it—do not believe.

For this there are two acceptable lines of interpretation. One is that the passage indicates a numerical majority of disbelievers who violated God's covenant within the group. . . . The other is that it means: 'Why, whenever the Jews make a covenant with their Lord, does a group of them break it? Indeed, th^{ese} group^s of them did not break it believing that they should not have done so, for most of them do not believe in the truthfulness of God and His Messengers.' In our book we have already demonstrated this meaning of *īmān* (= faith, belief), that it 'means' *taṣḍīq* (= attesting the truthfulness, or truth, of someone).¹

¹ See Exeg. 2: 3, p. 95.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ نَبَذَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

wa-lammā jā'a-hum rasūlun min 'indi 'llāhi muṣaddiqun li-mā ma'a-hum nabadha farīqun mina 'lladhīna ūtu 'l-kitāba kitāba 'llāhi warā'a zuhūri-him ka-anna-hum la ya'lamūna

When a Messenger from God has come to them confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the scripture reject the Book of God behind their backs, as though they did not know,

¶ WHEN a Messenger—i.e., Muḥammad [=Al-Suddī, 1643]—has come 'to' the scholars and the learned among the Jews of the Children of Israel «confirming what was with them»—Muḥammad confirmed the Torah and the Torah confirmed him, that he was a prophet of God sent to His creatures—. . . «a party of them that were given the scripture»—the scholars among the Jews to whom God gave knowledge of the Torah and what is in it—«reject the Book of God»—deny it and discard it, i.e., the Torah, after having affirmed it, out of envy for 'Muḥammad' and being unjust towards him—«behind their backs».

«'B'ehind their backs» is a metaphor . . . meaning 'to be rid of something.'

⇒Al-Suddī:

When Muḥammad came to them, they opposed him with the Torah and argued against him with it, but the Torah and the Qur'ān agreed, so they rejected the Torah and took up the book of Āṣif and the magic of Hārūt and Mārūt.¹ That is what is meant by God's words «as though they did not know.» [1644]

¶ «'A's though they did not know»—. . . as if they did not know about the command to obey Muḥammad and attest his truthfulness, which is in the Torah. . . [⇒Qatāda, 1645]

¹ For these three names, see Exeg. 2: 102, pp. 481–5.

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيْطَانُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ بِبَابِلَ هُرُوتَ وَمُرُوتَ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّى يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

wa-'ttaba'u mā tatlu 'l-shayāṭīnu 'alā mulki Sulaimāna wa-mā kafara Sulaimānu wa-lākinna 'l-shayāṭīna kafarū yu'allimūna 'l-nāsa 'l-siḥra wa-mā unzila 'ala 'l-malakaini bi-Bābila Hārūta wa-Mārūta wa-mā yu'allimāni min aḥadin ḥattā yaqūlā inna-mā naḥnu fitnatun fa-lā takfur fa-yata'allamūna min-humā mā yufarriqūna bi-hi baina 'l-mar'i wa-zauji-hi wa-mā hum bi-dārrīna bi-hi min aḥadin illā bi-idhni 'llāhi wa-yata'allamūna mā yaḍurru-hum wa-lā yanfa'u-hum wa-la-qad 'alimū la-mani 'shtarā-hu māla-hu fi 'l-ākhirati min khalāqin wa-la-bi'sa mā sharaw bi-hi anfusa-hum law kānū ya'lamūna

and they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery, and that which was sent down to the two angels in Bābil, Hārūt and Mārūt; they did not teach any man without saying: 'We are but a trial; do not disbelieve.' From them they learned how they might sunder a man from his wife, yet they did not hurt any man thereby, save with God's knowledge, and they learned what hurt them, and did not profit

them, knowing well that whoever buys it shall have no share in the world to come; evil then was that they sold themselves for, if they had but known.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-'TTABA'Ū
MĀ TATLU 'L-SHAYĀTĪNU 'ALĀ MULKI SULAIMĀNA

¶ THE group of the scholars and learned among the Jews whom He described as casting His Book, which He sent down to Moses, behind their backs, affecting ignorance for, and disbelieving in, what they knew, as if they did not know, . . . discarded His Book which they knew had been sent down from Him to His prophet, and violated His covenant which He had taken from them to act according to what was in it, and chose instead the sorcery which the satans had recited at the time of the kingdom of Solomon, the son of David, and followed it. This is clear straying and errancy.

[T]: «THEY»: FIRST OPINION: Some of them said that God meant by this the Jews who were in the vicinity of the abode of emigration of the Messenger of God¹, Medina¹, because they disputed with the Messenger of God¹ using¹ the Torah, and found the Torah to be in agreement with the Qur'ān, commanding obedience to Muḥammad and attestation of his truthfulness as did the Qur'ān; then they disputed using¹ the scriptures which, during the time of Solomon, the people had copied from the priests (*kahana*).

⇒ Al-Suddī:

«[A]nd they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign»—during Solomon's time. (...) The satans used to ascend to the sky, sit down at listening posts, and listen to what the angels were saying about death, rain, and any matter on earth. Then they went to the priests and told them, and the priests narrated to the people, and they found that it was as they said. Then, when the priests had found them reliable, [the satans began to] introduce into [their reports] other things [they had not heard], and for every word they added seventy more. Then the people wrote these¹ reports¹ down in books, and [the rumour] spread among the Children of Israel that the jinn knew the Unseen. So Solomon sent envoys¹ among the people to collect these books, and he put them into a coffer. Then he buried it under his throne, and none of

the satans could go near the throne without being consumed by fire; he said: 'If I hear anyone saying that the satans know the Unseen, I shall have him beheaded!'

When Solomon died, and when the learned who knew what Solomon had done had passed away and successors had taken their place, Satan disguised himself in the form of a man, and went to a group of the Children of Israel and said: 'Shall I point out a treasure to you which you will never exhaust?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Then dig under the throne.' And he went with them and showed them the place, but stood aside. So they said to him: 'Come near¹er¹.' He said: 'No. But I am here in your hands, and if you do not find it, kill me!' So they dug and found these books. When they had taken them out, Satan said: 'It was by this sorcery that Solomon held control over men, satans, and birds.' Then he hurried away and disappeared. So [the rumour] spread among the people that Solomon had been a sorcerer, and the Children of Israel made use of these books. When Muḥammad came to them, they argued with him using¹ them, and that was when He said «Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery». [1646]

⇒ Al-Rabī' 'b. Anas¹:

They say [that] the Jews once asked Muḥammad about things from the Torah, but for everything which they asked him God sent down to him [an answer] to what they asked, and so he defeated their arguments. When they saw this they said: 'This man knows more about what was sent down to us than we do.' So they asked him about sorcery and disputed with him about it. So God sent down «and they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery»; and the satans turned to a book and wrote down in it sorcery, divination, and what God wished of this; then they buried it under Solomon's seat. But Solomon had no knowledge of the Unseen. When Solomon departed from this world, they exhumed this sorcery and deceived the people with it. They said: 'This is a science which Solomon hid and begrudged the people.' So the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, told them this narration, and they left him and were disheartened, for God had invalidated their proof. [1647; see also ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 1648]

SECOND OPINION: Others said instead that by this God meant the Jews during Solomon's era.

⇒ Ibn Juraij:

The satans recited sorcery to the Jews during Solomon's reign. And the Jews followed it, i.e., they followed sorcery during Solomon's, reign. [1649]

⇒ Ibn Ishāq:

When the satans learnt of the death of Solomon, the son of David, peace be with him, they began to write down the different categories of sorcery: «Whoever desires to attain such-and-such should do such-and-such». Then, when they had arranged the different categories of sorcery, they put them down in a book and stamped it with a seal of the same design as Solomon's. Then they wrote down for its title: «These are the Stores of the Treasures of Science which Āṣaf, the son of Barakhyā, the Righteous (*al-ṣiddīq*), wrote for King Solomon, the son of David». Then they buried it under his throne. Subsequently the remaining Children of Israel exhumed it, when they committed what 'evil' they committed, and when they had discovered it they said: 'This must be what Solomon 'used'.' So they spread sorcery among the people: they taught it and they learnt it, and among none is it more common than it is among the Jews.

When the Messenger of God mentioned Solomon, the son of David, in what had been sent down to him from God, and counted him among those who had been sent with a Message, those Jews who were in Medina said: 'Are you not amazed at Muḥammad? He claims that Solomon, the son of David, was a prophet! By God, he was only a sorcerer.' So God sent down «and they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved» concerning this which they had said.

When Solomon's kingdom was suspended, a group of the jinn and mankind reneged 'their religion' and followed 'their own' cravings. Then, when God restored to Solomon his kingdom, the people practiced the 'fir' religion as before. Solomon came to know of their books, and buried them under his throne. But Solomon died at about this time, and the jinn and mankind 'again' became acquainted with the books after Solomon's death. They said: 'This

is a book from God which came down to Solomon—and he kept it hidden from us!' So they adhered to it and took it for a religion. So God sent down «When a Messenger from God 'came' . . . to them confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the scripture 'rejected' . . . the Book of God behind their backs, as though they did not know, and 'followed' . . . what the satans recited», and these were stringed instruments and game^f, and everything which diverts one from the remembrance of God. [1650]

TABARĪ'S OPINION: The preferable opinion about the interpretation of His words «and they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign» is that it is a rebuke from God for the Jewish rabbis who were contemporary with the Messenger of God, and denied his prophethood although they knew that he was a Messenger of God sent with a Message; a censuring of them by Him for having discarded His revelation, and for having given up acting according to it, when it was in their hands and they knew it and recognized it to be the Book of God, and for their, and their ancestors' and forebears', having followed what the satans in the time of Solomon had recited. We have already explained the reason why it is permissible to attribute to them what their ancestors did.¹

We have chosen this interpretation because those who followed what the satans recited 'lived' during Solomon's time and after him up to the time that God sent His rightful prophet, and sorcery continued among the Jews. And there is no indication in the verse that God intended only some of them when He said «and they follow». Since it is permissible and correct in the speech of the Arabs to attribute what we have described—'i.e., their ancestors' following 'what the satans recited' . . .—to their descendants after them, and there is no transmitted Tradition from the Messenger of God which 'obliges us to interpret' this specifically, nor is there any proof demonstrating 'such an interpretation', we must say that all the Jews who have followed what the satans recited during the time of Solomon are included in the meaning of the verse, as we have said.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *MĀ TATLU 'L-SHAYĀṬĪNU*

(...)

§ Tabarī gives two views from the interpreters about the meaning of «*tatlū*»:

that it means 'they narrated, transmitted, expressed, recited' [= Mujāhid, 1651; ⇒Qatāda, 1652; ⇒'Aṭā', 1653; ⇒Ibn 'Abbās, 1654]; that it means 'they acted according to, followed' [=Ibn 'Abbās, 1655; ⇒Abū Razīn, 1656]. Both these interpretations, according to Ṭabarī, are justified as far as Arabic usage is concerned, and he sees no way of deciding between them.

THE INTERPRETATION OF 'ALĀ MULKI SULAIMĀNA

§ Ṭabarī says that «'alā» (=lit., upon) here means *fi* (=in, during), and he refers back to a previous discussion about the interchangeability of these two particles.² [=Ibn Juraij, 1657; ⇒Ibn Ishāq, 1658]

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ KAFARA SULAIMĀNU WA-LĀKINNA 'L-SHAYĀṬĪNA KAFARŪ YU'ALLIMŪNA 'L-NĀSA 'L-SIḤRA

§ Ṭabarī discusses a potential question as to why there should be a denial here that Solomon was an unbeliever, when nothing has been mentioned about anyone ascribing unbelief to him. What is the connection between this and what has just gone before? He says that it is an answer to the Jews' claim that Solomon was not a prophet, but a sorcerer, and to their ascription to him of what He had just ascribed to the satans. God thus refuted the idea that he was a sorcerer and an unbeliever [=Sa'īd b. Jubair, 1659]. Ṭabarī quotes further Traditions which give various details about the reason for the revelation of this passage, and the occasion on which it was revealed.

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

It was something which happened to Solomon, the son of David, on account of some people from the family of a woman who was called Jarāda (=the 'Locust'), who was one of the dearest to him of his women. (...) Solomon wished the right of al-Jarāda's family to be upheld, so he judged in their favour, but he was punished for not being impartial towards them. (...) When Solomon, the son of David, wanted to go to the toilet or to seek the favours of his women, he would give his signet ring to al-Jarāda. So when God intended to afflict him, that day he gave al-Jarāda his signet ring, and Satan came in the form of Solomon and said to her: 'Give me my signet!' Then he took it and put it on. When he put it on, the satans, the jinn, and mankind came under his power. (...) Then Solomon came to her and said: 'Give me my signet!' She said: 'You are lying; you are not Solomon.' (...) Then Solomon knew that it was a tribulation 'from God'. (...) Then the satans hurried

off, and during those days they wrote a book in which there was sorcery and unbelief, and they buried it under Solomon's seat. Then they exhumed it and recited it to the people, saying: 'Solomon owed his power over the people to this book.' (...) So the people became free of Solomon's sovereignty¹, and called him an infidel, until God sent Muḥammad, and sent down «and they follow what the satans recited during Solomon's reign»—i.e., the sorcery and unbelief which the satans wrote down—. «Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved», so God sent down his absolution. [1660 and 1662. For other variations, see ⇒Abū Mijlāz, 1661; ⇒Qatāda, 1663, 1664; ⇒Mujāhid, 1665; ⇒Shahr b. Ḥaushab, 1666; ⇒Ibn Ishāq, 1667]

Since 'the interpretation of this passage' is as we have described it . . . , it is clear that something has been omitted 'whose meaning can be supplied by the rest of the passage' . . . , and that the meaning of the passage is:

¶ And they followed the sorcery which the satans recited during the reign of Solomon and ascribed to Solomon; but Solomon was not an unbeliever who practised sorcery; but the satans were unbelievers and taught the people sorcery.

(...)

⇒Qatāda:

«Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved», meaning: It was not something he suggested, not something he assented to, but something the satans invented by themselves. [1668]

(...)

§ Ṭabarī points out that this was not the first time that sorcery had been practised: Pharaoh is said in the Qur'ān to have practised it, and the people of Noah are said to have accused him of practising it.³

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ UNZILA 'ALA 'L-MALAKAINI BI-BĀBILA HĀRŪTA WA-MĀRŪTA

§ Ṭabarī gives several opinions about the meaning of «mā» at the beginning of this passage. According to the first opinion [=Ibn 'Abbās, 1670; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1671], it is a particle of negation, and the corresponding interpretation

of the verse is: They follow the sorcery which the satans recited during the reign of Solomon; but neither was Solomon an unbeliever, nor did God send sorcery down to the two angels, rather the satans disbelieved and taught sorcery to the people in Bābil—Hārūt and Mārūt. In this case, Ṭabarī says, the two angels are Gabriel and Michael, because Jewish sorcerers falsely claimed that God sent down sorcery to Solomon through Gabriel and Michael, and the Qur'ān denies this; and Hārūt and Mārūt are the names of the two men to whom they taught sorcery in Bābil. According to the second opinion, «*mā*» means 'that which'. Hārūt and Mārūt are accordingly the names of two angels to whom sorcery—different from that which the satans received—was sent down at Bābil.

⇒'Abd Allāh 'b. Mas'ūd':

«'A'nd that which was sent down upon Bābil's two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt». They were two angels who were sent down to judge among men. That is, the angels scoffed at the laws of mankind. (...) A woman came to them for judgement, and they were biased towards her. Then they prepared to rise up 'to heaven', but they were barred from 'doing' this. They were given to choose between the punishment of this world and the punishment of the Hereafter, and they chose they punishment of this world.

Qatāda', who reported this from Ibn Mas'ūd,¹ said: 'Then they taught the people sorcery, but, before they taught anyone, they had to say: «'We are but a temptation, do not disbelieve.'» [1672]

⇒Al-Suddī:

As for His words «'A'nd that which was sent down upon Bābil's two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt», this was another 'kind' of sorcery 'using' which 'the Jews' also disputed with 'Muḥammad', which means that they disputed with him 'using' what had been sent down to the two angels; and when the angels taught mankind what they said about what was happening among them, and it was acted upon, it was sorcery. [1673; see 1646, of which this is the completion]

⇒Qatāda:

«'The satans taught' the people sorcery, and that which was sent down to the two angels». Sorcery is of two 'kinds': the sorcery which the satans teach, and the sorcery which Hārūt and Mārūt teach. [1674]

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

«'A'nd that which was sent down upon Bābil's two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt» was¹ how to separate a man and his wife. [1675]

(...)

QUESTION: Is it admissible that God sends down sorcery, or that His angels teach it to people?

REPLY: God sent down both good and evil, and explained all this to His servants and revealed it to His Messengers, commanding them to teach His creatures and acquaint them with what He has made lawful for them and what unlawful, like adultery, theft, and the other sins which He has informed them of and forbidden them to commit. Sorcery is one of these sins which He has told them about, and forbidden them to practise.

There is no sin in knowing about sorcery, just as there is no sin in knowing how to make wine, sculpt idols, 'or make' stringed instruments and games, the sin is in making them and setting them up. Likewise, there is no sin in knowing about sorcery, the sin is in practising it, and in harming with it someone whom it is not lawful to harm.

Thus there is no evil in God's sending it down to the two angels, nor in their teaching those to whom they taught it, for they . . . taught them with God's knowledge . . . , after telling them that they were a trial, and after forbidding sorcery, its practice, and unbelief, to them. The only sin is if someone learned it from them and practised it, for God has forbidden its practice. . . .

§ According to a third opinion, also, «*mā*» means 'that which', but it refers specifically to the knowledge of how to sunder a man from his wife [⇒Mujāhid, 1677]. A fourth opinion allows both «*mā*» as a negative particle, and «*mā*» as a relative pronoun [⇒Al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, 1678, 1679]. Ṭabarī prefers the interpretation of «*mā*» as a relative pronoun and not as a negative particle, and of Hārūt and Mārūt as the names of the previously mentioned two angels; he then goes over other opinions giving reasons against them, mostly based on the difficulties that ensue in interpreting the rest of the verse.

(...)

'Here we shall' mention some of the Traditions which explain 'who' the angels 'are', and those who have said that Hārūt and Mārūt are the angels whom God mentioned in His words «in Bābil»:

⇒Ibn 'Abbās:

God split open the heaven for His angels to see what mankind was doing, and, when they saw them committing wrongs, they said: 'O Lord, these humans whom You created with Your hand, to whom You made Your angels prostrate, to whom You taught the names of everything, are committing wrongs.' He said: 'But if you were in their place, you would be doing the same things.' They said: 'Glory be to You, it ought not to happen with us!' (...) They were commanded to choose who would be sent down to earth. (...) They chose Hārūt and Mārūt, and they were sent down to earth. And everything was made lawful for them there except that they were not to associate anything with God, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to drink wine, and not to kill anyone—which God had made unlawful except by right.

(...) They were not there long before a woman appeared to them to whom half of 'all' beauty had been given, and she was called Baidhakht. When they saw her, they wanted to commit adultery with her, but she said: 'No, not unless you associate 'partners' with God, drink wine, kill someone, and prostrate before this idol.' They said: 'We cannot associate anything with God!' Then one of them said to the other: 'Return to her.' But she said: 'No, not until you drink wine.' So they drank until they were drunk. Then a beggar came in to them, and they killed him. And when they had fallen into the evil they were in, God split apart the sky for the angels, and they said: 'Glory be to You. You know better!' (...) So God inspired Solomon, the son of David, to make the two 'angels' choose between the chastisement of this world and the chastisement of the Hereafter, and they chose the chastisement of this world. They were put in fetters from their ankles to their necks, like the necks of bactrian camels, and they were placed in Bābil. [1681, and ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1687—an expanded version. See also ⇒Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās, 1682; ⇒Ka'ab al-Aḥbār, 1684, 1685; ⇒Nāfi', 1688]

⇒Al-Suddī:

One of the things about Hārūt and Mārūt was that they criticized the people of the earth and their legal rulings. So they were told: 'I gave mankind ten carnal desires, and it is through these that they disobey Me.' Hārūt and Mārūt said: 'O Lord, if You gave us these carnal desires we would descend, and we would judge with

justice.' He said to them: 'Go down, I have given both of you these ten carnal desires, so judge between the people.' So they came down to Bābil in Dunbāwand, and they judged until the evening when they ascended, and when it was morning they came down.

They continued thus until a woman came to them to bring a complaint against her husband, and they wondered at her beauty. Her name was al-Zuhara (Venus) in Arabic, Baidhakht in Nabatean, and Anāhīdh in Persian. Then one of them said to the other: 'How she delights me!' And the other said: 'I wanted to tell you, but I was ashamed in front of you.' The other said: 'Do you want me to mention it to her?' He said: 'Yes, but what about our being punished by God?' The other said: 'We shall hope for God's mercy.' Then, when she came to bring the complaint against her husband, they spoke to her about herself, but she said: 'No, not until you give judgement in my favour against my husband.' So they found for her against her husband, and she promised a meeting with them among some ruins to come to her there. So they came to her accordingly. And when one of them wanted to have sexual intercourse with her, she said: 'No, I 'will' not do this until you both tell me what words you say to ascend to heaven, and what words you say to come down therefrom.' So they told her, and she uttered them and ascended; but God made her forget what she could come down with, so she stayed where she was, and God made her a star.—Whenever 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar saw her he would curse her and say: 'This is the one who seduced Hārūt and Mārūt!'—When night came, the two of them wanted to ascend, but they could not, and they knew they were ruined. They were given the choice between the chastisement of this world and the Hereafter, and they chose the former rather than the latter. So they were hung up in Bābil, and they started to speak to the people in their speech, and that was sorcery. [1686; also ⇒'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, 1683; ⇒Mujāhid, 1689]

§ Ṭabarī records the variant reading *malikaini* (=two kings), which, he says, corresponds to the interpretation of Hārūt and Mārūt as two men, which he has already dismissed on rational grounds. He dismisses this variant reading on the grounds that the authoritative reciters are unanimous in rejecting it.

As for . . . «Bābil», it is the name of a town or place on earth.

[T]: «BĀBIL»: FIRST OPINION: Some said it was Bābil in Dunbāwand. [⇒Al-Suddī, 1690, the same as 1686 above]

SECOND OPINION: Some said that it was Babylon (Bābil 'Irāq). [⇒'Ā'isha, 1691]

[T]: «SIHR/SORCERY»: FIRST OPINION: Some said it was deception—tricks and meanings which the sorcerer produces so that it seems to the person for whom it is being done that it is the opposite of what is 'actually' there, like someone who sees a mirage from afar and it seems to him that it is water . . . [⇒'Ā'isha, 1692, 1693; ⇒'Urwa b. al-Zubair and Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyib, 1694—all of these Traditions concern a Jew of the Banū Zuraiq who bewitched Muḥammad]. Those who hold this opinion deny that the sorcerer is able to change something from what it really is. . . . They say: If sorcerers could generate bodies and change the realities of things from the forms they were in, there would be no separation between truth and falsehood They 'also' say that in God's description of Pharaoh's sorcerers, when he says «And lo, it seemed to him, by their sorcery, their ropes and staffs were sliding» (20: 66), and in the Tradition's from 'Ā'isha [1692, 1693] about the Messenger of God, that when he was bewitched it seemed to him that he did something, when he did not, 'in these two texts' is the clearest of proofs of the falsity of those who claim that the sorcerer generates the things themselves by his sorcery

SECOND OPINION: Others said that the sorcerer is able to change a man into a donkey, to bewitch the man and the donkey, to generate things and bodies.

⇒'Urwa b. al-Zubair:

'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said: 'A woman from the people of Dūmat al-Jandal came to me. She arrived seeking the Messenger of God after he had recently died, to ask him about some sorcery which she had become involved in but had not practised.'

'Ā'isha said to 'Urwa: 'O son of my sister, I noticed that she cried when she did not find the Messenger of God to comfort her. She cried until I showed compassion for her. She said: "I am afraid that I have been ruined! I had a husband who left me, and an old woman came to me and I complained to her about this. She said: "If you do what I tell you, I shall make him come 'back' to you."

Then, when night fell, she came to me with two black dogs; she mounted one of them, and I the other. In no time at all we had stopped in Bābil, where there were two men suspended by their feet. They said: 'What has brought you here?' I said: 'I would learn sorcery.' They said: 'We are but a trial, do not disbelieve, return.' I refused, and said: 'No.' They said: 'Go to that oven and urinate into it.' So I went, but I was terrified and did not do 'it'. I went back to them, and they said: 'Have you done 'it'?' I said: 'Yes.' They said: 'Did you see anything?' I said: 'I did not see anything.' They said to me: 'You did not do it; go back to your country, do not disbelieve.' But I stayed put and refused 'to go'. They said: 'Go to that oven and urinate into it.' I went, but I trembled with fright. Then I returned to them and said: 'I did 'it'.' They said: 'What did you see?' I said: 'I did not see anything.' They said: 'You are lying; you did not do it. Go back to your country and do not disbelieve. You are in control of your affairs.' But I stayed put and refused 'to go'. They said: 'Go to that oven and urinate in it.' So I went there and urinated into it, and I saw a horseman wearing an iron mask come out of me and go up into the sky; he disappeared from my view so that I could not see him. Then I came to them and said: 'I have done 'it'!' They said: 'What did you see?' I said: 'I saw' a horseman in an iron mask come out of me and go up into the sky till I could not see him.' They said: 'You are speaking the truth. That was your faith leaving you. Go.' I said to the 'old' woman: 'I learned nothing. They told me nothing!' She said: 'No. You will not wish for anything without it happening. Take this wheat and sow it.' So I sowed it, and said: 'Sprout!', and it sprouted. Then I said: 'Burgeon forth!', and it burgeoned forth. Then I said: 'Ripen!', and it ripened. Then I said: 'Harden!', and 'the grain' hardened. Then I said: 'Be milled!', and 'the grain' was milled. Then I said: 'Be baked!', and it was baked. When I saw that everything I wished for would happen, I was horror-struck, and, by God, I repented, O mother of the faithful! By God, I have never done any 'sorcery', nor will I ever.'" [1695]

Those who hold this opinion . . . say that if the sorcerer were not able to do what he claimed he could do, he would not be able to sunder a man from his wife, . . . but God has said that 'sorcerers' learned from the two angels how to sunder a man from his wife. If that were not

something that really happened, but were only deception and imagination, it would not be a true sundering, whereas God has stated that they really sunder 'them'.

THIRD OPINION: Others said instead that sorcery is 'seizure by the evil eye'.

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ YU'ALLIMĀNI MIN AḤADIN
ḤATTĀ YAQŪLĀ INNA-MĀ NAḤNU FITNATUN
FA-LĀ TAKFUR

¶ The two angels did not teach anyone the sundering of man and wife which was sent down to them without saying to them: 'We are but an affliction and a trial to mankind, so do not disbelieve in your Lord.'

⇒ Al-Suddī:

When someone came to them, i.e., to Hārūt and Mārūt, wanting sorcery, they admonished him and said to him: 'Do not disbelieve, we are but a trial.' And if he scorned 'their warning' they would say to him: 'Come to these ashes and urinate on them.' And when he urinated on them, a brilliant light would come forth from him and go up to the sky—and that was faith—and something black like smoke would approach and go into his ears and everything of his—and that was God's wrath. And when he told them about this they would teach him sorcery. These are God's words: «they did not teach any man without saying: 'We are but a trial; do not disbelieve.'» [1696. See also ⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1697, 1700; ⇒ Qatāda, 1698; ⇒ Ma'mar, 1699; ⇒ Ibn Juraij, 1701]

As for «*fitnatun*», in this place it means 'test', 'trial'. . . [⇒ Qatāda, 1702].

THE INTERPRETATION OF FA-YATA'ALLAMŪNA MIN-HUMĀ
MĀ YUFARRIQŪNA BI-HĪ BAINA 'L-MAR'I WA-ZAUJI-HĪ

¶ The two of them taught no one until they had said: 'We are but a temptation', but 'the people' refused to accept this from them, so they learned from them how they might sunder a man and his wife.

(...)

§ Ṭabarī is of the opinion that there is no connection implied in the verse between the two angels' teaching these people how to sunder man and wife and the satans teaching the people sorcery.

(...)

§ In accordance with his previous explanation of sorcery, Ṭabarī says that the sorcerer effects the sundering of man and wife by making them appear to each other as the opposite of what they really are. He thus does not cause their separation directly, but through the intermediary of his ability to make people see things other than they are. The Arabs, he says, call the originator of something its cause, even if that thing does not issue directly from it.⁴ In support of his interpretation, he quotes from Qatāda [1703] that the sundering is effected by making each of them hateful to the other.

(...)

THE INTERPRETATION OF WA-MĀ HUM
BI-ḌĀRRĪNA BI-HI MIN AḤADIN
ILLĀ BI-IDHNI 'LLĀHI

¶ Those who learned from the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, how to sunder man and wife did no harm to anyone through what they learned from them . . . except to those that God had determined would be harmed by that. However, those from whom God averted His harm and preserved from the evil consequences of sorcery, magic blowing and charms (*siḥr*, *naḥṭh*, *ruqā*), will not be harmed by it, or suffer its harmful effects.

There are several aspects to 'the word' *idhn* (=permission) in the speech of the Arabs. One of them is 'that it is' a command with no complusion. But it cannot be 'the meaning in this passage' . . . , because God has made the sundering of man and wife other than by sorcery unlawful, so how much more 'if it be done' by sorcery Another 'aspect is that it means' letting the person who is given it have his own way in it Another 'aspect is that it is' knowledge of something; with respect to this aspect, one says 'I was informed (*udhintu*) about this matter' . . . ,† and this is the meaning of the verse, as if He said: Yet they did not hurt anyone with what they learned from the two angels without God's knowledge; i.e., 'without' the fact that they would hurt him existing already in God's knowledge [⇒ Sufyān al-Thaurī, 1704].

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-YATA'ALLAMŪNA*
MĀ YADURRU-HUM WA-LĀ YANFA'U-HUM

¶ The people who learned from the two angels the meaning which sunders man from wife which was sent down to these two . . . learned from them the sorcery which harmed them in their religion and was of no benefit to them in their Return, although in the affairs of this world they gained from it and made a living from it.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-QAD 'ALIMŪ LA-MANI*
'SHTARĀ-HU MĀLA-HU FI 'L-ĀKHIRATI MIN KHALĀQIN

¶ The party 'of Jews' who, when a Messenger from God came to them confirming what was with them, cast the Book of God behind their backs as though they knew not, and followed what the satans recited during Solomon's reign, . . . knew that whoever buys sorcery at the price of My Book which I sent down to My Messenger¹, Muḥammad,² and prefers it shall have no share in the world to come [⇒ Qatāda, 1705; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1706; ⇒ Mujāhid, 1707; ⇒ Ibn Zaid, 1708].

§ Ṭabarī explains that the meaning here is one of an oath, as if God said: 'They knew that, by God, whoever . . .'

(...)

[T]: «*KHALĀQ*»: FIRST OPINION: Some said that in this place *khalāq* meant 'share' [⇒ Mujāhid, 1709; ⇒ Al-Suddī, 1710; ⇒ Sufyān al-Thaurī, 1711].

SECOND OPINION: Some said that *khalāq* here 'means' 'proof (*hujja*)' [⇒ Qatāda, 1712].

THIRD OPINION: Others said that *khalāq* 'here means' 'religion' [⇒ Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, 1713].

FOURTH OPINION: Others said that *khalāq* here 'means' 'support (*qiwām*)'.

ṬABARĪ'S OPINION: The most correct of these opinions is that of those who said that *khalāq* here means 'share'. For this is its meaning in the speech of the Arabs . . . Thus it is with His words «shall have no share in the world to come», 'i.e.,³ shall have no part of the Garden in

the Hereafter. . . . He means by that that they shall have no share of good things there, but that they will have their share there of evil things.

THE INTERPRETATION OF *WA-LA-BI'SA MĀ SHARAW BI-HI*
ANFUSA-HUM LA W KĀNŪ YA' LAMŪNA

¶ Evil then was what those who learned sorcery sold their souls for, if they had but known their evil outcome.

(...)

§ Ṭabarī answers a possible objection. If those who practised sorcery knew that they would have no share in the Hereafter, how could they not know that what they sold their souls for was evil? It is, he says, a case of the words being in reverse order to the meaning; what it actually means is that those who had learned how to separate a man and wife did not know that what they had sold their souls for was evil, for some of them did not know God and His commands and prohibitions. Then God turns to the party of the Jews who were contemporaries of Muḥammad and who rejected the Book of God and relied on sorcery, and says that they well knew that whoever buys sorcery shall have no share of good in the Hereafter. He then rejects a claim that those who knew that sorcerers have no share in the Hereafter were the satans while those who did not know were men, on the grounds that this contradicts what all the interpreters said, i.e., that the former passage referred to Jews rather than to satans, and that this is clearly supported by the context. He then mentions an opinion that both these passages refer to the same people. They knew that sorcerers would have no share of the world to come, but then they did not act according to what they knew, and someone who does what he knows he should not do can be said, in some sense, not to know what he is doing. Although Ṭabarī admits that this interpretation is not, in principle, inadmissible, he rejects it on the grounds that it is not understood from the ostensive text, and that there is no incontrovertible evidence for the correctness of this inferred meaning.

¹ See *Exeg.* 2: 83, p. 426 and n. 8.

² Ṭabarī refers to a discussion about prepositions, particularly about the preposition *ilā*, at *Exeg.* 2: 14 (see Sh. & Sh., I, 299).

³ For the interpretation of *sihr* (= sorcery), see further on in the exegesis of this verse.

⁴ Ṭabarī previously made this assertion—while refuting the free will doctrine of the Qadariya—as evidence towards the claim that God is, in fact, the cause of the actions of men. See *Exeg.* 1: 7, p. 79 (Sh. & Sh., I, 196).

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وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِندِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّوْ
كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

*wa-law anna-hum āmanū wa-'ttaqaw la-mathūbatun min 'indi 'llāhi
khairun law kānū ya'lamūna*

Yet had they believed, and been God-fearing, a recompense from
God had been better, if they had but known.

¶ If those who had learned from the two angels how to sunder a man and wife «had believed», and attested the truthfulness of God and His Messenger and what he had brought from their Lord, «and feared» their Lord . . . and His chastisement, and obeyed Him by carrying out His ordinances and kept away from disobedience to Him, God's recompense and reward for them for their faith in Him and their fearing Him would have been better for them than sorcery and what they gained from it, «if they had but known» that God's reward for them would have been better for them than 'this'.

. . . By His words «if they had but known» He denies them the knowledge of the extent of God's reward, and the scale of His reward for obedience to Him.

In the speech of the Arabs *mathūba* is a verbal noun from 'the IVth form verb¹ *athāba* (=to repay, reward). It originally comes from 'the Ist form verb¹ *thāba*, meaning 'to return'. Then one 'uses the IVth form and¹ says '*Athtabu-hu ilay-ka* (=I made it return to you)', and the meaning of someone's recompensing (*ithāba*) someone for a gift or whatever is that he gave him something in exchange for it Then anyone who gives someone else something in return for an act, a gift, or help, which he had previously given him, is called his *muthīb*. From this comes God's *thawāb* for His servants for their acts, meaning His giving them recompense and reward for them, so that a compensation for what they have done for Him comes back to them [=Qatāda, 1717; ⇒Al-Suddī, 1718; ⇒Al-Rabī' b. Anas, 1719—all of which interpret «*mathūba*» as *thawāb*].

(...)

Cumulative indices covering all five volumes
will appear at the end of volume 5.